

## **Innkeeper 281**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 281: The return of Tiffany

It was like a sudden festival at the Inn, and everyone was suddenly enjoying the festivities. Many people were watching from the comfort of their rooms, but many had come out into public spaces to enjoy the atmosphere. There were two topics that were being discussed most commonly.

First, who was crazy enough to attack the Inn? Even though there was an invasion a short while ago as well, no guests were hurt, which showed just how in control the Inn was of everything. Second, the topic was who would be the winner for the 50,000 MP prize?

The contestants' names were shared, and if the contestant permitted, some information about their cultivation and ability.

The crowd favorites were Rorick Morrison, for naturally he had a stellar reputation on Earth, a well-respected captain from the Jotun army, here on vacation from the Vegus system, and finally a young devil.

But the bets were not only one who would win, but on how many points any of the participants could get. Considering the limited number of enemies, no one was expected to have an overwhelming lead, but there were still a few who were expected to get at least 10 points.

While the crowd was hyping themselves up, the Inn's staff was preparing for the event. Mary was spreading the delinquent vines underneath the battleground, and Qawain was requested to help out as well. He would only interfere if a participant was about to die, and would remove them from the formation. This technically wasn't a part of his job, but the Inn staff was all so friendly - a stark difference from the humans he had met early when he gained sentience - that he had become fast friends with many of them, and so did not mind helping out.

In the meantime, some of the staff who were free stood in awe. For example, Z, who had been slightly traumatized from how badly he was wounded, could not help but compare how they had handled the situation, versus the Innkeepers arrangements. This invading force, despite being fewer in number, was much stronger since most of their forces were in the Golden Core realm, with quite a few Nascents as

well. Despite that, not only had they been easily herded into the formation, but the Innkeeper, instead of getting angry at the invaders, actually used them to entertain his guests.

He was so vastly different from Z's direct boss, Leo, the original caretaker of the Gamer's den. Z could not remember the last time he saw Leo, and of all the Inn's staff and workers, he was the most absent. His sheer laziness and lack of effort was all the more apparent in front of the Innkeepers silent dedication towards the Inn.

Velma had a day off and was, surprisingly, sitting alongside Larry. If Lex noticed him, he would be tremendously surprised to discover that Larry was in the Golden core realm. His cultivation was more focused on absorbing various rare metals into his body than anything else, and the Inn had been a good source for that. During all his time here, his many attempts at wooing one of the waitresses had failed miserably, but he had developed a decent friendship with Velma out of it.

She especially loved hearing stories of his failed exploits back on Earth and often encouraged him to keep on trying. In fact, she even set Larry up with a Neko (cat-human) from X-142 and, well, it wasn't a complete failure - yet!

"Are you placing any bets?" Velma asked as she looked at the screen.

"I don't have the MP to spare. I'm a wanted man, back on my planet, so it's hard to come by any money. What about you? Place any bets?"

"Heh, of course I did, and not just a small bet. I placed all my savings on a single participant," she said with a sly smirk. "If you beg me, maybe I'll share with you what I know."

"Oh? In that case, oh noble miss of the Inn, I implore you to impart onto me some information. I could really use some MP. You know if I go back to my planet, my life will be in danger."

"Cheh, fool someone else. I know you've been hiding in King Marlo's new mansion, disguised as a gardener. Who has the guts to do anything to you there?"

"How did you know?" Larry asked, genuinely startled, only to be responded with a knowing smile.

"Well, anyway, since you asked so nicely, I'll tell you. The winner is going to be a human from Nibiru. She's extremely powerful, extremely ruthless, and she benefited greatly from the upgrade Nibiru is undergoing in its star level. She's been hiding at the Inn lately, because she's caused a lot of problems back on Nibiru, but if she wins this 50,000 MP, it'll be tremendously helpful to her so she won't let anyone else get it. Her name is Tiffany."

Having full faith in Velma, Larry bet quite a decent amount on her.

Countless conversations similar to that one were taking place, but little Tiffany from Nibiru remained overlooked in almost all the bets, since no one knew her.

Eventually the time ran out as 30 minutes was just a short interval, and the event was finally beginning. Mary instructed all the participants to make their way to the battleground while she explained the rules once again. Killing an enemy got them 1 point, but capturing an enemy got them two points. This wasn't really a fair event, considering the higher leveled cultivators had a blatant advantage, but as an impromptu event held in the absence of the Innkeeper, it could not be perfect. Another rule was stated right before the contestants went in, which is that anyone who attacked a fellow contestant would get disqualified.

With that, the event began and all the contestants walked through the white wall of the formation, appearing at the far end from where the invaders were.

Nzaar immediately noticed their entry, and immediately picked up on the fact that they were exactly the same number of enemies as him and his crew. Many thoughts ran through his mind, but his orders to his crew were ruthless and efficient, as usual. There was no buildup to the fight as it immediately began!

It was absolute chaos, and in the very first second, Qawain separated several participants who were going to die under Nascent level attacks. These participants were, naturally, disqualified. On Nzaar's end, however, they had no immortal to protect them, so immediately there were some deaths.

The Nascent cultivators took to the skies, fighting in midair. The pillagers and participants both wanted to avoid friendly fire, for their own reasons, which formed an unspoken understanding. On the ground, however, it was absolute chaos.

No one had even tried to capture an enemy instead of killing, for the battle was too dangerous to take any risks. The numbers dropped quickly and in just the first few minutes; it went from 101 pillagers to mid-60s while the participants actually dropped to the 40s! The pillagers fought for a living, while the participants were just the lucky ones who managed to enter the tournament first. It was fortunate that Qawain was able to save all of them with great skill, removing them without harming them or their enemies.

But, after the first massive drop in numbers, the fight stabilized as the remaining few were similar in strength and skill. It was here that the strength of the pillagers became evident, for not only were they skilled in fights, but they had incredible cooperation as well.

The participants, on the other hand, were just fighting randomly. Even when they paired up, they could not match the synergy of the enemies. But, while they were the ones under pressure, the remaining participants were elites in their own rights. It was now that a few names started to stand out on the leaderboard. A surprise to everyone, except two specific people, was that on the top of the leaderboard was the name Tiffany. She already had 20 points! This wasn't because she had killed 20 people, but that she incapacitated every foe effortlessly, at which point a vine would emerge from the ground and take the captured enemy away.

When Tiffany struck a foe, it was no longer a matter of skill. Her ability was so astounding that even the viewers could not accurately understand what happened - despite the effect being quite simple. If she attacked a pillager with a punch, and the pillager blocked her punch, without moving anywhere, the pillager would be struck by a sonic boom before fainting. If a pillager managed to dodge her punch, however... still sonic boom. If a pillager saw that she had the intention to attack, and ran away... sonic boom. If a pillager thought about attacking her, he would suffer a sonic boom. One pillager, in fact, only gave her a dirty look before suffering a sonic boom.

The most common wound her victims suffered was ruptured eardrums - if they had those! She was a force of nature, an unstoppable entity with a relentless will. She was the living embodiment of the drumming in a good rock song, because wherever anyone heard her strike, they would get chills!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 282: Don't forget the esthetics

Lex was not observing the event too closely, and was more focused on monitoring its success overall. It was for that reason that he did not recognize Tiffany, not to mention that she looked vastly different from when he last saw her.

The guests, however, could not take their eyes off her! She was ruthless, not in the sense that she was defeating every enemy she came across. Her staggering performance was throwing off all the bets people had placed! Some noticed that there was more to her attacks than the simple sonic booms, but even if they could discover the secret, it would not help them remedy the situation!

It was fortunate then that the battle entered a balanced phase. The pillagers' coordination was keeping them from suffering any more losses while the participants' extreme powers and skills saved them. Whichever side gave in first would suffer tremendously.

In the air, the battle was a lot more hectic! Nzaar was proving his worth and fighting three Nascent participants on his own, and seemed to be winning! Furthermore, he was better equipped than the participants for the fight, which gave him an edge in both offense and defense.

The various pillagers under him also seemed to be more skilled than the participants and even Rorick found himself suppressed - something he hadn't encountered in a long time.

"Marry, I'm busy over here, so I'll check back in later," said Lex, once he was satisfied with how the event was progressing. "Don't hesitate to call me if any issues arise, but if there aren't any problems, then just wait for me to get done to give me the report."

Lex turned his attention back to the issue of deciding on his techniques. He could have continued to focus on the Inn, it would have taken at most a few more hours, but Lex was pressed for time. Not only did he have to go through this massive list and decide on his techniques, he had to practice them as well. If he had access to a Meditation room from the Inn, it would be no problem learning them, but as things were, he didn't know how long it would take. In a few days, when his classes started, he would be even more strapped for time, which is why he had to make the most of every moment.

His first priority was evasion and escape. Evasion could fall under movement type techniques, but escape covered a last array of technique types. This would help him escape from any enemies who were too strong for him, or escape in a situation where he gets trapped the way that Druk had.

The options were truly diverse, and it was at this point that techniques with spiritual affinities started to come into play. Wind, lightning and ice were some of the more common affinities seen in movement techniques, but the most incredible and effective ones seemed to be from space affinity. Lex did not have any affinities, as far as he knew, but he tried out the simplest movement technique with a wind affinity to see if he could use the technique. He could not.

It would require more research to understand why this was so, but for now, he accepted that fact and moved on. For clarification, while he could not use any techniques that required his spiritual energy to have an affinity, a neutral technique that took advantage of an element in nature was an entirely different concept. An example was the defensive technique he used that absorbed 'cold energy'. It did not require Lex to have an icy affinity at all.

In the end, Lex decided on two movement techniques. The first, Hearts Marathon, was similar to his previous movement technique Falcon relief in the sense that it boosted his overall speed in every sense. This would not only help in escaping, it was great for evasion, blocking, attacking and everything else that required any form of movement. It had a fixed cost in terms of spiritual energy, meaning it would use up Lex's energy at a constant rate while he was using the technique.

The second technique, Home Sweet Home, was used for a linear burst that would increase Lex's speed tremendously! Its most obvious use was for escape, or to gain a lead during a chase, but Lex could imagine himself using it to close in on an enemy as well. Its peculiar name was due to the technique's creator's deep wish to run back home any time he left his house.

The escape techniques, which were next, gave Lex a migraine. They seemed to be as useless as they were diverse, and all the good ones seemed to require an affinity. Or they had extreme requirements which were difficult to fulfill. In the end, Lex picked one called the In-Law effect that Lex suspected he would be able to use due to a loophole.

The requirement was stringent, and required Lex to stay in one location for up to 3 hours while he used the technique. But once the technique was done, it was supposed to let the user's soul leave the body, and move up to several miles away, depending on how much energy was used. This technique was not designed for humans, whose souls were too weak to leave their physical body at this level. However, Lex suspected that due to the nature of his body and soul, he would be able to use the technique without issue. It would require some testing to determine, but if it didn't work, Lex could always pick another one.

Next, Lex planned on picking defensive techniques, offensive techniques, and some miscellaneous techniques, in that order.

The reason he was picking techniques in that order was that, now that the options available to him were more versatile, he planned on using his uncanny ability to learn defensive techniques in various ways.

Blocking attacks and protecting himself definitely was a priority, but why should he limit himself to just that?

If, for example, he created a shield so sturdy his enemies could not break it, then could he not use that shield to trap his enemy as well? Theoretically, couldn't he create some kind of defensive barrier and then... walk over it to form an impromptu bridge? To be honest, he didn't know the limits to which he could use these techniques, but he fully intended to find out.

But while he could learn endless defensive techniques, it was best to focus on just a few for now. Too many techniques would make it difficult for him to choose the best one in the heat of battle, and drastically reduce his efficiency in utilizing them.

The first one he picked was called Talk to the Hand. It allowed him to extend an invisible barrier from his hand that could extend 12 feet (3.6 meters) in length and 8 feet (2.4 meters) in height. The best part was, the strength, or technically defense, of the barrier was directly proportional to Lex's bodies. It was unfortunate that it required Lex's hand to be up, which limited its distance and eliminated the element of surprise, but Lex was looking forward to the day he could block a barrage of long range attacks simply by holding out his hand.

His next technique was called Ripple shell. It formed an elastic barrier around him that spread any damage received across its entire surface to reduce the effect. What Lex liked most about this was that this barrier would not stop Lex from attacking or doing anything else, and once Lex used it, it would continue to exist without being a drain on Lex's energy pool.

Following that Lex picked up a few circumstantial techniques, for example there was one that strengthened the defensive capabilities of objects, there was another designed to protect inner organs and one in particular that required an external energy source to sustain once established.

With just these few techniques, Lex already had a few plans about how he could implement them in different situations.

Next up, the attack techniques. For this, Lex already had a clear cut idea of what he wanted. He was searching for overwhelming attacks, to serve as trump cards or secret aces to use in opportune moments. This was because Lex already knew that Regal Embrace would cause him problems when learning attacks.

The solution Lex had thought of was to focus more on his technique, weapons, and arrays for attacking.

He thought it would be hard to pick out such a technique, but it turned out to be the easiest. Lex was extremely satisfied with the techniques description, build up and implementation. The technique was called Evisceration, and was for what it did... it was all in the name.

Finally, it was time for the miscellaneous techniques. The techniques that weren't strictly designed for battle, and could be used in multiple scenarios.

Choosing these took the longest for these were the most commonly used techniques, and would accompany Lex on a day to day basis. Not only would they affect his quality of life, they would affect his future as well. These included techniques to dormant formations, traps, arrays or other techniques. It also included things such as healing and preservation techniques, cleaning techniques, air and water filtration techniques. Heck, it even contained things Lex had never even considered, such as refining the etiquette of your energy implementation and signature. In high society, where even things such as forks and knives had to be used in the proper fashion, how could it be possible for one to let their energy signature run rampantly?

These esthetic based techniques, in fact, were the rarest of all. Some would even give your energy a pleasant scent and sensation.

Much later, Lex did not even realize how much time he had spent looking through these techniques, and eventually fell asleep in the library, still scrolling through the many options. He could not help but think, in his last waking moments, how helpful some kind of smart, computerized assistant would be that could sift through all this mess and just tell him the techniques most optimal for him.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 283: Lady Velma

While Lex looked through the techniques and selected them, the Midnight Madness eventually came to a somewhat unexpected end. Despite Tiffany's admirable start, the favorites for victory were still the Nascent level cultivators. Yet there was an unexpected turn. While all his subordinates and lieutenants were defeated, Nzaar himself held up the remaining Nascents by himself.

This gave plenty of time for Tiffany to rack up an irrecoverable lead. In the end, literally besieged by all the participants, Nzaar still managed to survive. He was defeated, not killed, though his condition wasn't the best.

There was a small celebration after the event ended, and Tiffany received her 50,000 MP as well as a special token to commemorate her victory. Larry and Velma became the biggest winner from all the bets - other than Lex, of course. Due to how unexpected the event went, most people lost their bets and Lex ended up raking in a neat 210,000 MP via all the gambling, feasting and celebrations.

Had Lex been paying attention to the Inn at this time, he would have noticed a few interesting things happening at this point.

Tiffany, along with her winnings, headed straight towards the greenhouse and waited in the forest for the Sovereign Galactic turtle to emerge. They talked for a bit, before Tiffany pulled up her makeshift backpack and from it extracted what looked like burnt up roots.

The turtle took the root from her, and the Gardener appeared beside Tiffany and accepted 40,000 MP from her. It may seem like she only had 10,000 MP remaining, but she had also inherited 20,000 MP from Igishima when he died, so she currently had 30,000 MP for herself! As for the details of the transaction that had occurred between her and the turtle... they were a secret known only to them.

While this was happening, Will Bentham finally signed the deal with the Governor of Vegus Minima, with Mary as the assistant Innkeeper as the witness, and through the Guild room conducted their first major transaction. Through the 1% charge of all transactions, Lex earned another 4 million MP!

It may seem like this was a lot, but the truth was, this was only a small part of the cooperation they were planning. Will Bentham was supplying the Governor with extremely rare resources they had managed to collect from their new Minor realm, but did not understand how to use. In exchange, the governor was not only providing them with various new technologies, far beyond anything Earth had, but also weapons and, most importantly, the knowledge to build a sufficiently advanced space command center!

After all their matters were concluded, Will went to attend another meeting in the Inn, this time followed only by his very competent bodyguard, Hugo.

When he arrived at the new room, it was Larry and Matilda who were waiting for him. Larry did not wear his usual cavalier smile, and in fact, had a grave look in his eyes.

"I was informed you have information about Hugo's family," Will said, sitting down. His bodyguard, Hugo Laurent, had only agreed to work with Will on the condition that Will help him investigate what happened to his family that had been killed behind his back. Larry and Matilda provided the first real lead he had been able to find.

"I hope you have some evidence to back up your claims. This is not a matter I treat lightly."

"Neither do we," said Larry, his fists clenched tight. "Actually, finding out about Hugo's family was coincidental. Let me introduce myself. I am Larry Dershaw, from the Dershaw family."

Will was startled, for he recognized the name. "I'm sure you've heard the stories about my family being banished to the moon. Well, sometime during the upheaval caused by the Council taking over Earth and the moon, my family disappeared. This is my associate, Matilda. Her brother was also killed by someone from the council. We were working together when..."

While this meeting was going on, yet another one was taking place between Sam Brown and Richard, two of the original Nascents from Earth, with a Devil. The details of the meeting were unsurprisingly cliché. The two, unwilling to come to terms with their lost power, were striking up a deal with a Devil.

Something that was surprising, however, was happening not in these meetings, but in the interrogation room near the greenhouse. All the captured pillagers were held prisoner here. To make things quite simple, and ensure that none of them cause any problems, Anita had volunteered her aid. She resurrected all the dead pillagers and had them guard these few survivors.

The undead pillagers, it must be pointed out, did not have the gruesome and decaying appearance one would assume. Not only had they recovered their appearance to what it was before they died, they had undergone some sort of cleansing. Since it was Anita's angelic voice that revived these bodies, as beautiful and pure as it was, the bodies were washed from their impurities. The shackles of a cruel life were lifted from them, the karma absolved, and what they turned into was if they had been saints, living a humble life of piety. They were as pure as the day they were born.

One extremely important thing to know about undead was that they did not retain their original souls, but new, extremely weak and feeble energy filled their body, replacing the function that the soul would have performed.

The security measures aside, the surprising occurrence here was not Anita's help in security, but who was performing the interrogations. There was no bloodshed, no weapons, no threats or blackmail. Instead, one of Nzaar's lieutenants, an alien known as Grumbal that looked similar to a Doberman with small, batlike wings on its back as well as a third eye on its forehead, was sitting nervously at a table with tea and biscuits placed in front of him. Opposite to him sat Velma, taking a small sip of her tea and then nodding, as if appreciating the taste.

"Please, I'll tell you whatever you want," the Grumbal pleaded, with tears welling up in its three eyes. At the same time, it nervously eyed its captured companions, but they were all unconscious. "We're pillagers, killers! We've looted all over the galaxy! Entire worlds have known our wrath..."

"Oh hush, why are you speaking of all these boring things?" Velma said chidingly. "I am a lady, and my friend Larry told me that ladies should not spend their time talking about violence. You know, you're not the first Grumbal I've met.

"Some time ago, we had this lovely couple visit us on their honeymoon. Well, actually, they were going to X-142 for their honeymoon, but through a twist of fate, ended up here. Oh their love story was so wonderful, I heard it from them a million times. I remember how the wife dedicated her life to her husband, and the mark of love she left on her husband, to tie their fates together." As she said that, Velma's eyes wandered to a patch of gray fur beneath one of the Grumbal's wings. "They told me that through the mark, they can always feel one another."

"No please no," the Grumbal trembled once again. "Please, I'll tell you whatever you want!"

"You will? How lovely. Then tell me, how did you two meet?"

The Grumbal trembled once again, and then, reluctantly started telling Velma his own love story. He made sure to fit in all the information about Nzaar he could, every opportunity he got, and gave as little information about his beloved as he could. If he didn't know any better, he really would start to feel that this wicked woman was more interested in his love life than their origins, but he was no fool. The moment he saw that evil woman, raise his former comrades to life, heal them of their injuries and then enslave their minds, he knew they had finally come across someone they should not have offended. It

was fortunate that those who came back to life did not seem to have their memories, or else he suspected he would not be given a chance to be interrogated at all.

Velma, on the other hand, listened to his story eagerly. Her endless curiosity, friendly attitude and love for gossiping had resulted in a unique situation that no one had yet realized. Even though she had never left the Inn itself, through talking to the various guests and learning all about their lives, along with the diverse crowd that the Inn had started to receive, in the entire Inn she knew more about the universe than anyone else.

She had become a living encyclopedia, and at the speed at which she gathered new information, soon it would be more fitting if Lex asked her questions about the universe than Mary. At least Velma wasn't limited by the system with what she could say.

As for whether she truly was only listening for love stories or actually fully interrogating the Grumbal, well, only the Innkeeper would find out when he eventually returned. She had prepared many reports for him about things she found interesting, reports even Mary did not know of.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 284: Midnight Tavern

Once Lex woke up he finished up his selection and returned to his apartment. There were many things he needed to practice, attacking with arrays and his new techniques among them. There was a part of Lex that wondered why he couldn't just use the techniques he already knew. After all, considering those same techniques would be powered by a stronger fuel source, they should be more powerful as well, right?

That was not what happened, as even fueled with spiritual energy rather than Qi, the techniques could not perform much better, for they apparently had an upper threshold. The techniques themselves were just not designed to be used on such a scale.

The intricacies of that Lex would learn during one of his new classes focused on cultivation, for now though, he was catching up with what occurred at the Inn. When he saw his MP balance at 6,451,000 he smiled. Once he had gotten the full update, the first thing that needed to be done was decide what to do with the prisoners. He didn't want to kill them outright, but considering their past, just kicking them out of the Inn wasn't the best solution either, since then Lex would feel responsible if they harmed someone.

In the end, he deferred the decision, and told Mary to make sure they wouldn't break free from their imprisonment. The second thing he needed to do, or rather, wanted to do, was something he had been thinking about for a while.

"Mary, now that we have decent security at the Inn, and our income has increased, there's something I want to try. I want to use the increased authority that I have and open up a branch of the Inn in this realm."

Mary was taken aback, as this was something that had never occurred to her. But, after her initial surprise, she replied, "that would be redundant. It may make sense for you to try to make another Inn there, but as soon as you are able to connect this realm back to the main Inn, the new branch would become redundant."

"Not necessarily," Lex replied confidently. "This is not a spur-of-the-moment idea. I've been thinking about this for a while. The main Inn will always be that one but, I want a few physical locations for the Inn in a few worlds as well. These new locations won't be operating the same way as the main one, they'll be a lot more low-key. But, for certain customers, if I like them, we can give them access to our better services, such as the Meditation room or Recovery room.

"After all, being teleported away to a new location is not ideal for everyone. This way, the Inn can become a part of a community and, once the realm is connected, it can even be a way we can give out golden keys. Furthermore, once we've connected this realm back to the main Inn, and we have a few more physical locations, it'll be a lot easier to find capable employees we want to hire. Plus, we can develop a network of Inns. We can gather information across the universe, offer the best services, make the best use of all resources. Our options are endless, we shouldn't limit ourselves by just doing the obvious. Weren't you the one who said to find ways to make use of the system's loopholes? Besides, how can the Midnight Inn be the best Inn in the universe if it only has one branch?"

Lex's last statement was one he said as a random justification for his idea, but it was as if Lex had somehow insulted the system's honor, and immediately prompted the release of a new quest!

New Quest: Establish a branch of the Midnight Inn: The Midnight Tavern!

Pay 5% accumulated energy

Pay 10 million MP

Quest Reward: Pocket Watch

Remarks: The Midnight Inn is the best universal hoteling establishment in this universe! How can it not have branches?

Lex, for once, was amused by the system's reaction while Mary was astounded by it. The truth was, she had a lot of ideas for how to develop the Inn, but she held back in expressing them because she didn't want Lex to become dependent on her for ideas. Lex's unorthodox way of thinking, however, seemed to have surpassed her wildest expectations for how to develop the Inn. It seemed, more and more, he was proving himself a capable Innkeeper. After all, he was no longer the one chasing quests to improve the Inn, but the system was giving out quests to meet his vision.

"Well, to be honest, this is not something I ever even expected," said Mary. "I had no way of figuring out how to even approach this, but with a quest, everything will become much easier."

"Easier, yes. But the wording on this quest makes it look like the system will form the tavern on its own once I pay up the MP as well as the energy. This is not good. While I save up for this, you have to think of a way to let me control where and how the tavern is formed. This has to go according to what I want."

"I'll look into it."

Lex came out of this much happier than he expected. He was completely prepared for there to be multiple problems with his idea, for he had already scoured the system interface and did not find any way to establish branches anywhere.

The next thing for him to focus on now was once again on collecting energy. Fortunately, Cwenhild provided him with a solution. The fact that the academy was going to open up multiple new Minor realms, completely unexplored, meant there were suddenly many areas easily within his reach where he could search for energy. He had not yet decided if he would join her group or go on his own. Once he had more information about this event, he would decide. The drawback of joining Cwenhild was that she was planning on focusing on a single Minor realm, instead of exploring many, while the advantage was that it would clearly be safer in a group than alone.

Lex put all these thoughts aside for now and focused on practicing forming arrays. He was a little excited, for this would be his first time trying to draw one.

Since he was just starting out, he chose an extremely simple and stable array. It only had a few characters and its only effect was to provide a small degree of warmth. This was an array commonly used while traveling to heat up places like rooms, tents, beds or even baths.

He stuck out his index finger and slowly started to draw a character in the air. You did not really need to draw each character like this by finger, but considering that Lex had only just reached the Foundation realm, his control over spiritual energy was not the best and this made it much easier. As he released the energy from his finger, it remained in the air with a silver hue. The hue was the effect of one of the 'esthetic' techniques Lex had picked up, since normal spirit energy would be invisible. He did this on purpose, for he needed to see if he was drawing properly and if any deviations occurred in the character.

It need not be said that Lex's handwriting was not... the best. Of course, that was before he started cultivating. Now he had much better control over his body, and though his handwriting had improved, drawing characters for arrays needed extreme precision.

After he completed the first character, the silver hue of the spiritual energy faded, and the character took on an orangish color. This was normal, as this character represented a type of ember.

After a moment, when the character did not explode or go horribly wrong in some way, Lex continued with the next one. Honestly, a part of him was expecting him to mess up somehow, but his control over his energy remained stable and each character he drew was perfect. A couple of minutes later, once the array was complete, the characters merged and a soft, yellow light emitted a gentle warmth into his room. It was like putting on a cozy pair of socks, still warm from coming out of a dryer.

For a moment, Lex was stunned. He actually did it on his first try? Wasn't this supposed to be a test of commitment and dedication, something that was supposed to take countless tries? Was he a natural at this?

No, going as far as calling himself a natural was surely conceited. After a moment of deliberation, though, he started drawing some new characters. This time, he was not drawing a tried and tested array, but one that he had thought up on his own. Theoretically, it should work, and now he would find out.

There were nine characters in this one, so it took much longer, for he was drawing very slowly. Eventually though, when he drew the last character, and all the characters started to merge into one, his heart skipped a beat. Could it really be possible?

An emotionless, electronic voice whispered in his ear, "Hello World."

Lex burst into a mad laughter. This would be fun.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 285: Understanding his instincts

The process of getting acquainted with casting arrays was a tedious one. After his initial 'Hello World' experiment, Lex no longer tried to cast any original arrays, and instead repeatedly cast the warming array he first tried. After successfully casting the array ten times, he paused to take note of his progress.

The first thing he noticed was that, for now, he was stuck being extremely slow at forming an array. If he tried to speed up writing a character even a little, the character would be disrupted and all the spiritual energy would disappear. That was only the case in this simple array, as for more complicated arrays, instead of disappearing, it may result in an adverse reaction.

The second thing he noticed was that, since he was taking so long in forming an array, large changes in the ambient spiritual energy could interfere with the array, causing it to fail. This was an issue he would need to address. He also learnt that if he ended up taking too long to form an array, that would also result in the array failing.

Fortunately, he had already taken a beginner's class for arrays and knew how to tackle many of these problems. All it would take now was the occasional adjustment and a lot of practice.

The next few days, all Lex did was practice his techniques or arrays, and met Amelia when she was free to get some rest and make sure he didn't burn out.

When his classes began, he had to reduce his practice time, but while it slowed down his progress with regards to his techniques, it helped him in other areas. Especially his class, that taught him more about

cultivation in general. In fact, in the very first class, Lex was able to understand why his 'danger instincts' were so much keener than the surrounding people.

"Cultivation is different for different species, and they each have various barriers," the professor explained.

"However, we will only be focusing on human cultivation for now. Regardless of what kind of cultivation system you follow, human cultivation is divided into three basic categories, namely the soul, spirit and body.

"Spiritual cultivation is one of the most widespread, mainly because the resources required to follow this cultivation path are readily available. That does not, however, mean that it is stronger or weaker than the other paths. Each of them have unique benefits. For instance, it may seem like it is more difficult to defeat an enemy that cultivates the body, but that is only because most people are more used to fighting against spiritual cultivators.

"The truth of the matter is, the most ideal cultivation would be to cultivate all three at the same time, but that is extremely impractical because of how difficult it would be, time and resource consuming it would be, and lastly, finding three compatible techniques to cultivate at the same time borders on impossible. But, all is not lost, for even if you only cultivate a single path, as you progress across the cultivation levels, the other two will also gradually be affected.

"When talking about specific benefits, let's begin with spiritual cultivation. Following the spiritual cultivation path grants the cultivator a strong and precise control over spiritual energy. This control can then serve to benefit the cultivator through the use of various professions, such as weaponsmiths, array masters, formation masters, and more.

"Furthermore, at the Golden core stage, it grants the cultivator access to spiritual sense, a sixth sense that cultivators can not only use to observe the world around them but also interact with it. It can allow you to directly communicate with others, and makes you more sensitive to the change in spiritual energy in the world around you. Another benefit, one that is often overlooked, is how cultivating the spiritual path allows you to increase the capacity of your brain. This doesn't mean it directly makes you smarter, but increases your capacity for multitasking, extrapolating better, and in general refines your thought processes."

The professor didn't elaborate, but Lex got a general idea. It was like improving the processor as well as RAM in a computer. If the tasks you were performing with the computer were affected by a lack of

those things, then you would suddenly notice a boost in performance. If, however, you weren't doing much to begin with, then no matter how much the computer improved, it would not affect things.

Or, a simpler way of putting it was that if you were smart to begin with, then you'd suddenly be able to do a lot more. If you were dumb, however, then an improvement in cultivation would still leave you dumb, but just faster at being dumb.

Lex snickered to himself before turning his attention back to the professor.

"The next most common form of cultivation is Body cultivation. It need not be said that the body is the foundation of our life, and cultivating your body makes you more resilient and harder to kill. A common misconception is that body cultivators are focused on great physical strength, and while that is true for many of them, it is not the essence of body cultivation.

"The essence of body cultivation is preserving life. At the same time, as a secondary effect, it drastically strengthens the subconscious mind. That means not only is your brain better at taking care of the various functions of your body, you become more sensitive to the minute details of what's happening around you.

"For example, if there is a person in front of you who suddenly decides to attack you, your body will automatically sense the miniscule changes his body would exhibit before he attacked and warn you about it. On a conscious level, you may not notice his change in stance, tightening of the muscles, his eyes scanning you for a weak point, but your brain would, and warn you in the form of instincts or gut feeling.

"But it goes beyond just that. Sometimes, the threat to your life is not coming from a person, but from some external factor outside of your current view. Since the focus of body cultivators is on preserving life, sometimes body cultivators are able to detect threats or danger from far off, with no apparent indication of the danger itself. The theory behind this is studied in a more advanced class, you only need to know that this is something they can do.

"We now know the individual benefits of cultivating two paths, but what if you cultivate both at the same time? Would the effects stay the same or possibly be even stronger? The answer is, not only would the effects remain, the growth in the effects would increase by an exponential amount. The cultivator would already have the energy sensitivity of a spiritual cultivator, but enhanced by the strength of the body cultivator's subconscious mind, the cultivator's control would quickly enter the levels of the most capable masters, and their precision would be exemplary as well. That is not to say,

someone who does not cultivate both paths cannot reach this level, but just that it would require more work.

"The cultivators' sensitivity towards danger would also increase, and this time, the increase is even more ridiculous. It has been reported that dual cultivators can sometimes even sense the exact moment someone decided to harm them, even if in a minor way. Furthermore, due to the granted sensitivity towards energy, the cultivator could also possibly detect dangers from nature, or natural disasters. In summary, it takes the advantages of both and multiplies it manifold. Of course, I'm sure all of you are also familiar with the difficulty of following such a path. It is absolutely not something that can be done on a whim.

"This finally leaves the last path, that of the soul. In a way, soul cultivators are considered both the weakest and the strongest. They are the weakest, because their distinct lack of spiritual techniques as well as a strong body make them more vulnerable. However, they are also considered the strongest because it is incredibly difficult to defend against a soul attack. Most cultivators are completely incapable of defending their souls before the Nascent realm.

"It's not just a matter of being unable to defend. Soul techniques are so rare that even those who want to learn to defend their souls may not be able to. Soul cultivators are also adept at various fields, such as tracking, cursing, enchanting and the like. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to lie or deceive a soul cultivator in the same realm.

"This is because, while they lack the sensitivity towards energy or danger, they can easily detect any living being's intentions from the fluctuations of their soul. When soul cultivators reach the Golden core realm, they gain the ability to communicate with any living being directly through their soul, making their ability more versatile than spirit sense in this regard."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 286: The true path

There was a moment of silence in class as everyone took a moment to absorb all the information. Soul cultivators were very rare, and often had odd occupations that made them difficult to counter.

Lex thought back to the Raskal invasion. Harry, despite being weaker than many, ended up doing some of the most damage to his enemies. But he wasn't just limited to that. As he was growing stronger, he was able to unlock more and more of his Glamor Sorcery abilities.

While at the start, his skills were limited to giving people mental clarity, these days he could even grant a few buffs to customers that would last days.

After giving his students enough time to ruminate about the new information he provided, the professor continued.

"Naturally, in the way body and spirit dual cultivators get the best of both worlds, anyone who dual cultivates the soul and spirit or soul and body also gets tremendous advantages. However, these combinations are even more difficult to achieve. Setting aside the difficulty of cultivating two paths, the real hurdle comes from the fact that unless the secondary cultivation path follows a technique that is complementary to the soul cultivation technique being used, it is nigh impossible to dual cultivate. It won't stop your progress in one, but rather, outright end your cultivation for both paths.

"It is for this reason that anyone who manages to find two complementary techniques often ends up killed, or creates a lineage. Even in the academy, getting access to such cultivation techniques is an extremely difficult task - not to mention the difficulty of following such a path afterwards. It is for that reason that you will rarely come across someone with these two combinations.

"But, while we're on the topic of cultivating multiple paths, I'm sure many of you are already wondering if it's possible to cultivate all three paths."

All the students held their breath, and Lex felt an unusual sense of anticipation fill the class. Lex furrowed his brows. The students seemed to know something he didn't. But it didn't matter. Lex focused his attention on the professor, for this information would help him understand his limits better. He already had an explanation for why he was able to form an array so easily, his energy sensitivity had been heightened. Now it was time to know what else he could do.

"As you all probably suspect, it is indeed possible. In fact, not only is it possible, cultivating all three paths simultaneously is the actual true form of cultivation, and is what differentiates the many races in different categories.

"The Crystal race, for example, all cultivate all three paths simultaneously. In fact, for them it is normal cultivation, as they do not have divisions in the paths the way we do. Theoretically, it is still possible for all humans to practice all three paths as well, if enough of the right kinds of cultivation techniques are spread. But that begs the question, since the King is so adamant in developing the human race, why hasn't he done so?

"The answer is fairly simple. Humans inherently are not very suited to cultivate. Cultivating two paths already more than doubles the difficulty in raising realms, but cultivating all three, with the talent of the average human, would require hundreds of years just to break through one major realm to the next. Of course, one of the greatest benefits humans have over other races is our high reproduction rate. No matter how difficult or rare, someone capable enough to cultivate all three paths is bound to appear. I'm sure you are all familiar with one of the only two publicly known humans to cultivate all three paths, the King!"

Excitement, enthusiasm and admiration all filled the students. No one even seemed to care that none of them would ever be able to cultivate all three paths. After all, how could they compare to the King? Lex however, was waiting for the professor to continue his explanation, but when he noticed that the professor was about to continue the class by progressing to a different topic, he interrupted to ask, "Professor, if the King is one of the two publicly known people to cultivate all three paths, who's the second? Also, what are the benefits of cultivating all three paths?"

The students looked at him oddly, and even the professor was surprised by the question, but answered anyway.

"The second person is naturally the Crown Prince, who is set to inherit the throne. As for the benefits, well, I can only speculate. Firstly, and perhaps most impressively, the survival instinct of the cultivator, amplified by the energy sensitivity and soul sensitivity, will be enhanced a hundredfold. In fact, it may even transcend the realm of survival instinct, and take another form that can sense more than just danger, due to the way the soul can sense intentions. I'd say, the cultivators' danger sense would probably end up being even better than cultivators in a higher realm.

"The control and sensitivity towards energy will also be exceptional. In the lower levels, it might not be so apparent, but in the Nascent realm, when cultivators deal with different forms and levels of spiritual energy, the advantage will truly bear fruit. In fact, those cultivators can probably pursue some truly unique professions, by combining various compatible soul and spiritual professions. A simple example is by combining Talismans and curses. Such things already exist, but require two or more cultivators to work together to form.

"The cultivator would also be extremely resilient. Fueled by spiritual energy, preserved by a strong body, and resistant to destruction due to the soul's own strength, the cultivator could probably easily survive wounds that would otherwise kill them. In fact, it would be so difficult to kill such a cultivator, I wouldn't be surprised if they walked through an erupting volcano-" the professor suddenly froze as he seemed to

recognize the student who had asked the question, and suddenly recalled some outlandish stories... could it be?

"Your name is Lex, right?" the professor asked.

"Yeah," Lex answered, suddenly getting a bad feeling. In his mind, the professor was judging him for asking a question everyone knew the answer to, specifically, the one about who the second cultivator of all three paths was. It was because he had judged the rumor he heard about himself to be so outlandish, he never even considered people could take it seriously.

How was he supposed to know that not only did this professor take it seriously, he suddenly filled in a few blanks about how the crown prince oppressed Lex, which was the reason he dropped his name. Furthermore, the stories of Lex's achievements, his survival during the expedition... along with his question about all three paths... could it be possible?

In the most absurd, roundabout way, the professor made a conclusion about Lex cultivating all three paths - the first true conclusion anyone had made about Lex.

Still, as a professor, he was mature enough to know not to spread rumors that he shouldn't. He did, however, silently decide to guide Lex to the best of his abilities.

"A basic enhancement of the individual abilities of all three paths is somewhat expected," the professor continued his class, suddenly a lot more serious. "But if that were all, this would not be considered the true form of cultivation, and the gap between us and the Crystal race would not be so huge. The higher the realm, the more evident the advantages will be, but even at a lower realm, such as the Foundation realm, the cultivator outclasses his peers." The professor had to try very hard not to look at Lex as he said that.

"Each path has its own techniques. Spiritual techniques for the spirit path, body techniques for body cultivators and soul for soul cultivators. But, there are rumors that for the true path, as some people call it, there is another form of techniques that take advantage of all three paths. Similarly, some records of the King from his youth suggest that he used to practice a unique profession Oblivator that no one else could, though there are no details of it available to the public.

"But, while those two previous aspects would require special information or heritages, there are other benefits as well. As many people know, the Foundation realm is when cultivators commonly begin to explore specializations. Sword intent is a good example of a very commonly pursued specialization. It is said those who follow the true path have an entire field of specializations that they can realize on their own. For example, if a true cultivator pursued the sword, it would not be the sword intent they realized, but something... more.

"Finally, the last rumor, and this is strictly a rumor, and has no proof or grounds for speculation, is that true cultivators can... adopt any spiritual affinity they desire."

This time, despite his efforts, the professor ended up looking Lex directly in the eyes. Lex gave away nothing, and wore the look of a simple, curious student. But it was already commonly accepted that Lex was exceptional, in which case, perfectly hiding his feelings fell perfectly within the realm of what he could achieve.

The class continued normally after that, and once it was concluded, the professor submitted an application to see the Dean - the King. Since he was just a normal professor, it would take months before he was granted the requested audience, if ever, but his speculations were too important to let slip, to anyone.

After class Lex checked his PT and noticed he had a letter from Cwenhild. She was inviting him once again to discuss her plan for the Minor realms. After a moments thought, he accepted the invitation.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 287: Headache

For once Lex did not need to take public transport as Cwenhild sent a private, small plane to pick Lex up. It was no bigger than the size of a regular car and was exceptionally fast. It was extremely luxurious, but that did not surprise him, considering her background. If only he knew that, after talking to him, she had severed her relationship with her father.

Unfortunately for her, since her act was rather public, she had to face tremendous backlash. Even though the King himself could not be bothered to reprimand her, as the most worshiped figure in the nation, it was many of his fanatic followers who could not swallow the insult. But none of that had anything to do with Lex, nor did he know about it.

The small plane landed on a rooftop landing pad in the highrise building where Cwenhild lived and Lex was escorted in. After being brought to a sitting room, he had to wait for a short while before Cwenhild burst into the room, a wide grin on her face. Lex immediately noticed that she looked exhausted compared to the last time he saw her, but she was also clearly more energetic.

"Lex, I'm so glad you came. I would have liked to invite you over just to get to know each other better before getting down to business, but I'm on a time crunch these days. I have to finalize my team for the Minor realm so that we can start training together, which is why I'll get straight to the point. What can I do to convince you to join my team? Your survival skills and consultation could make a huge difference in trying to take over a Minor realm."

She was a lot more upfront than Lex expected, but the end result was the same. Lex had already given some thought to this, and was leaning towards joining her anyway, but since she was so open with her offer...

"Since you've been so direct, then there's no point in me beating around the bush. There are a couple of things I have in mind, and if you can help me out, then I'll be more than happy to join you."

"Go ahead. What do you need?"

"Truth be told, I myself am searching for something that I expect can be found in the Minor realms. I was planning on going to a few myself to search, but I have never been to a Minor realm and don't know what to expect. I was, of course, going to start researching Minor realms on my own but I expect, since you are planning on capturing a Minor realm you've already done quite a bit of research. If you can provide me with all the information of the kinds of Minor realms, the academy has opened up before, as well as what to expect, I wouldn't mind helping you out first. As for the second thing, well, considering I have to take care of my own expenses, let's keep it simple and settle on some money."

It did occur to Lex to set some ridiculous conditions in exchange for his help, but doing so would put a strain on their relationship. Lex was not necessarily a materialistic person, but one would still have to be an idiot to ruin a good working relationship with an influential person for short-term gain. As it happened, his two requests perfectly fulfilled his needs, so it was good enough.

Cwenhild, who was expecting something much more lavish, was surprised by the simplicity of Lex's request. Her demure demeanor in front of Lex did not mean she was a simple or inexperienced person, and was well versed in the ways of the world. Considering the complexity of her request, Lex asking for such simple remuneration could be nothing other than a gesture of friendship.

"If you don't mind me asking, what are you looking for in the Minor realms? Maybe I can help you out with that."

Lex did not reply, but only gave her a sly smile. There was no way to explain that he was searching for large reserves of natural energy, and he did not consider it a big deal that he should want to keep a few secrets. Seeing that Lex did not want to elaborate, she understood that it was likely a private matter. Regardless, she was not being greedy, and had only wanted to help. Since she could not help directly, then she would think of another way to respond to his gesture.

"Well, no matter. Your requests are simple enough so we can begin immediately. I'll introduce you to my team. There will be a total of 12 of us, including you. The academy will open the Minor realms in six weeks, so during this time we need to work on our coordination and cooperation."

Cwenhild immediately started debriefing Lex over her plans, many of which surprised Lex. 12 was a very small number, how were they supposed to take over a Minor realm with that? Or maybe his understanding of what it meant to take over a Minor realm was flawed. Moreover, as he listened to her breakdown her plan for the next few weeks, and then the upcoming event itself, he let out a small, internal sigh.

A very large part of him already knew this, but a small part of him had been hoping for some kind of miracle. He was hoping to stumble into a big enough pool of energy and somehow make it back in only a few short months, but more realistically, he was stuck here. The thought did not depress him, he had become more resilient than that, but it snuffed out the small hope he had been carrying.

As it so happened that with the death of that small hope, Lex's mind opened up to a new series of possibilities. As he listened to Cwenhild's plan, and saw how she took advantage of every possible opportunity, he became inspired.

His new frame of thought was simple. As long as he was stuck here, he could continue to take advantage of his increased authority. In that case, instead of filling 100% of his energy reserves, he should continue to expand and improve the Inn with his increased authority. This way, when he returned to the Inn, it would be extremely well equipped to help him progress, not only as the Innkeeper, but in his cultivation as well.

After all, he did not want to spend 100s of years on a single breakthrough, like his professor predicted. Though, he had a sneaking suspicion that if he could continue to have the Lotus improve his body, his cultivation would be much quicker. Still, it made no sense not to use the advantages that he had.

With this renewed mindset, Lex threw himself into his studies, practice, and preparation. Over the next few weeks, Lex thoroughly prepared himself by becoming familiar with his new techniques, upgrading his equipment with the truly insane amount of money Cwenhild had paid him - as an advance, only - and began to familiarize himself with Cwenhild's team.

Despite Lex's focus and determination, however, things did not always go over smoothly. First of all, his progress with the offensive technique Evisceration was very slow. Lex had to be extremely careful while practicing it, for if something went wrong, he would end up injuring himself a lot. Furthermore, as predicted, Regal Embrace seemed to resist his efforts at using his technique. The only fortunate news he had in that regard was that his progress with arrays was good, and Regal Embrace did not seem to trouble him when the attack came from an array rather than a technique.

Secondly, there were a couple members of Cwenhild's team who clearly had a strong bias against Lex. They never showed it when the lady herself was around, but whenever she was absent, not only would they stop cooperating with him, they would actively try to antagonize him. Lex tried to mend the relationship, but after they rebuffed his attempts, he stopped caring. After all, he wasn't responsible if Cwenhild's endeavor failed due to them. Furthermore, he was not at all afraid of them, for everyone in the group was in the Foundation realm, and Lex's instincts told him they could not harm a single hair on his body. Not to mention, if they ever tried to act against him, his survival instincts would warn him well in advance.

Lastly, there were a couple of matters at the Inn that kept distracting him. Not only was the date for Earth's Expo coming closer, requiring him to start preparing for that somehow, but there was a group of troublesome people at the Inn.

Tiffany, after her victory at the Midnight Madness, had attracted a lot of attention, which was the true origin of the problem. Things got so out of hand that Mary finally informed Lex, who eventually recognized the once sweet and immature little girl. The problem now, though, was that despite her actual young age, she had the body of an adult. Since that was the case, no one suspected otherwise and... a Tiffany fan club had been established by a group of bachelors and bachelorettes from various planets.

Every day, they would duel each other in public to attract her attention, recite the sappiest poems about her strength and reenact plays about her supremacy. Such a group, naturally, incited others and quickly various fan clubs started meeting at the Inn. Things were now already out of hand.

The true problem occurred when... Audrey Morrison, Alexander's grandmother, learnt that she had a fan club who was competing with... a fan club for Velma who, in turn, was competing with a fan club for Gerard!

Lex rubbed his forehead, trying to alleviate his headache, as he never knew dealing with a bunch of simps was so difficult. After all, Audrey was not content with leaving things as they were, and insisted on the targets of the various fan clubs directly competing with one another. As for the method of competing? Naturally it was...

The Innkeeper

Chapter 288: Lady Cosmos

Since Audrey was the one proposing the method of competition, and the focus of the challenge was to see who was the best and more worthy of having fans, she proposed a pageant. A tournament would have been more straightforward, but Audrey was not much of a fighter herself, not to mention the contestants were in various realms as well.

That was all well and good, but it wasn't like anyone could be forced into participating in the pageant. Tiffany neither understood the concept, nor cared for such a pointless contest. A few others as well were not so keen on the idea. That's when the crowds started getting rowdy, and some even tried to harass the focus of various fan clubs.

Let alone the fact that no one coming to the Inn was weak, the huge fan bases themselves weren't ready to see their idols being targeted. A fight nearly broke out and was only contained due to the timely action by the Security guards.

Lex was very firm in his decision that such actions will not be tolerated! Anyone who harassed another guest would suffer a temporary ban from the Inn, and the holographic personal assistants conveyed this message clearly to all guests.

He hoped that this would be the end of the matter, but as he had become somewhat familiar with Audrey, he doubted it.

And, indeed, the matter did not end there, though fortunately Audrey decided to be a lot more sensible in her next action. She went to Earth, acquired the rights to the competition known as Lady Cosmos, an annual international beauty pageant, and decided the next one would be held at the Inn.

Not only would the contestants be from the solar system, but from any star system that wished to join - making it the first ever, true Lady Cosmos. Brandon, who always supported his wife in every endeavor, immediately opened up his wallet.

He immediately spent an astounding 1.5 million MP on the event, and had a detailed meeting with Mary about what they wanted for the event. Since they were planning the event to happen soon, only 1 Earth month away, Lex had to take time out from his already jam-packed schedule to settle the details for the event.

This was not such a straightforward matter, as Audrey and Brandon were accompanied by their lawyer, who wanted to establish a detailed understanding of everything the event would entail. It was fortunate that Lex was not so easily flustered, regardless of how eloquently the lawyer spoke.

Since the lawyer was bringing up various requirements, Lex cut the conversation short by asking one crucial thing. Would the Inn simply be the venue for the event, or also take part in the organization of it?

If the Inn were only the venue, then they would only provide the basic facilities. However, if the Inn were also organizing, then they would try to fulfill the competition's needs, but according to their own regulations. Lex neither had a detailed grasp of the various laws on Earth, nor cared for them. The Inn was not subject to Earthen law.

In the end, they decided that the Inn should help organize the event for them, but there were a couple of important conditions for that. There was no way to enforce Earth's trademarks or copyrights in space, but since the Inn was helping to organize this event, they had to agree not to host another beauty pageant with the same name in the future if it was sponsored by someone else. Furthermore, although Audrey did not care, the pageant was a business and so they wanted to hash out the details of how they would generate income.

Lex let Mary handle the details of negotiating how the income would be split after giving her an overview of what he wanted - he really didn't have the time to be dealing with stuff like that, but he did want a cut for organizing the event would take a lot more than a simple 1.5 million MP. In the end, after

everything was concluded, Mary briefed Lex on everything so that he could use the Event management panel to take care of everything.

This was a prime example of how his increased authority was coming into use, for normally he would only be able to broadcast any event happening within the Inn. However, Audrey wanted the event to be broadcast to every planet that sent a contestant - something he could barely manage.

But first, he had to prepare for the event as well as advertise it. When he was holding the Midnight games, he spent 50,000 MP per planet he advertised to, and sent the invitations to the leaders directly. This time, he planned to be slightly more subtle in his advertising, and also planned to advertise a little within the Inn as well. He had a lot of guests going in and out every day, even from parts of the universe he had not connected planets to yet, so word of mouth would also serve him well.

Counting Earth and Mars, as well as all the inhabited planets in the Nibiru, Vegus, and X-14 star systems, as well as the advanced way in which he wanted to spread the word, Lex directly spent 1 million MP on advertising. He spent another 40,000 MP on the venue, a large rectangular building with statues of gorgeous women wearing crowns, carved out of the finest marble standing fifty feet (15.2 meters) tall near the entrance. They were the previous winner of the contest.

The entrance was sealed for now, but a large marble plaque outside the venue stated the purpose of the venue, the details of the event, and how to register if anyone was interested.

He would arrange for security, the broadcasting and other miscellaneous tasks closer to the event itself.

Done for now, Lex returned his attention back to training and studies. Currently, he was sitting in his Kraven class, and the professor was discussing the biology of the strange creature that had managed to dominate their realm. Lex tried to focus back on class as he rubbed his temple. No matter how cultivation made his brain faster, it could not make up for how much he hated studying biology.

Amidst all his studying, training, doing research and practicing his arrays, Lex had overlooked two simple facts. He had overlooked how vast the reach of his Inn had actually become, and he had overlooked the universal love for beauty. He had grossly underestimated how many guests this next event would attract.

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## X-142, A farming village

Hailey was slowly trudging back home after a long, exhausting day at the farm. Considering her peak Foundation realm cultivation, the difficulty of her routine was self-evident. She had lived her whole life in a farming village and from a young age she had been taught the wonders their farming produced. The value of their crop was phenomenal, which is why it took years of hard work for a single crop yield.

She had believed, she had worked, and she had toiled just to be qualified to be a farmer. But when she actually got to work, spending 16 hours a day, waist deep in mud, nourishing the crops with fertilizer with her own hands she realized... there was no glamor in the life she had always pursued, and there was next to no reward.

She got paid for her work, but even if one ignored the ridiculously small amount of pay considering her cultivation, she never had the physical or mental energy to do anything. Today was more of the same, and after returning home and taking a shower, she flung her frail body in bed.

But, as much as she wished to immediately fall asleep, her body ached too much to let her fall asleep. Eventually, she gave up, and pulled out an old news crystal. She got this the last time she visited a city, many months ago, but by now she had memorized the entire thing. Every news article, every bit of gossip, every adv- eh?

In the upcoming events, something new had suddenly appeared. For a moment she was dazed, and tried to remember if she had seen this before. But that was impossible, her memory would not fail her, especially when she had read through this crystal numerous times. What was going on?

More curious than anything, she read the new article that had appeared out of thin air. It was a pageant for the most capable and talented women in the cosmos. For a moment, she let herself imagine a life in which she could enter something like that, and her wings, fair and beautiful, involuntarily stuttered.

Then, the news article shone with a golden light and enveloped her. When the light disappeared, she was no longer in her home, but stood in the middle of a road, cutting through a massive field.

A hologram of another Cheonsa, a winged subspecies of humans, appeared before her and said with the most radiant of smiles, "Welcome to the Midnight Inn."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 289: The capitalist returns

Hailey was bewildered, and for a moment, couldn't understand what was happening. Then she tried pinching herself to ensure she was awake. Just as her thoughts were about to spiral, her assistant continued speaking.

"Do not be alarmed, dear guest, if this is your first visit to the Midnight Inn. The only way in and out of the Inn is through teleportation, and you were teleported here due to your interest in the Lady Cosmos pageant. You are free to leave whenever you so desire, and the Inn takes special care of security, so you are completely safe here."

"The Lady Cosmos competition?" she repeated, her attention directly diverting to what she cared most about. "Why would I be brought here for the Lady Cosmos pageant?"

"Why, to register, of course. The pageant is in a month, but participants are suggested to arrive a few days before the event so that you can become familiar with the format of the pageant and make preparations. Of course, you can register any time between now and when the event actually starts."

"I can... be in the pageant?" she repeated, dumbstruck.

"Naturally," the hologram replied once again.

Hailey was dumbstruck, and she looked once again at the wonderland that she had been transported to. Was this really not a dream?

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Earth, Interstellar Confinement facility

Vera Joel, a political prisoner and a secret oracle, was scribbling mindlessly in her notebook. She was bored out of her mind. It wasn't because the facility they were locked in was like a prison. No, the facility had everything from various sports courts, cinemas, shopping malls, schools and much, much more.

After all, the difference between a political prisoner and a real prisoner was vast - they couldn't really be mistreated.

The one constraint on them, though, was that after the discovery of the Midnight Inn, they were regularly checked for golden keys. Even if they wouldn't be able to go anywhere else from the Inn, no one wanted to take a chance. And so she was stuck.

Until something changed, and she saw a vision of a new future. Her expression changed from boredom to excitement in a flash and she sprinted to find her mother, Kristine Joel. She whispered something in her ears, before the two jaunted off to a nearby store. From the shelf, they picked up a couple of magazines and quickly returned to their rooms.

"Are you sure?" Kristine asked, but the only response she got was a flash of golden light. Her daughter had already found a small ad for the Lady Cosmos pageant and had teleported to the Inn. Kristine shook her head and quickly looked through her own magazine. A moment and a flash later, she too was gone.

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Countless other women, or it would be more accurate to say females, from various parts of the universe began to learn about the Lady Cosmos pageant and started arriving at the Inn, one by one. Some saw the ads in magazines, some in news crystals, some in unskippable YouTube ads and some saw the venue at the Inn itself.

But, surprisingly enough, it wasn't Lex's own advertising that spread the word the most.

It was the Iron Heart pirates, the one for which Booty was first mate, that did the brunt of the work. From port to port, planet to planet, star system to star system, they spread the word and enticed any who would be willing to listen.

It need not be said that they recruited more members for the audience than they did actual candidates, for the love of beauty and competition thrived just as much in the worst of degenerates as it did in cultured socialites.

Naturally, they charged a premium for anyone who wanted a key for the Inn from them. After all, the Innkeeper wouldn't mind if they made a little pocket money while doing so much legwork, right?

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Completely unbothered by the steadily increasing traffic at the Inn, Lex continued his routine. Maintaining the mindset that Mary would let him know if anything went wrong, Lex was completely dedicated to being fully prepared for the Minor realm.

After all, this was the only time he would have. The pageant would begin right before he had to head to the Minor realm, and the two events would likely overlap. Soon after that would be Earth's Expo. Speaking of which, Miranda should probably be coming by the Inn soon to discuss the details for the event.

It was like this that Lex spent his time, the month gradually passing by, right up until 8 days before the Lady Cosmos pageant. One week before the event began, the participants were encouraged to come to the Inn so that they could start preparing. Lex thought everything was under control, for he had once again purchased the unlimited rooms option that he had once gotten for the Midnight Games. He was planning on purchasing the same kind of security as well and continued to let Mary handle things, but that's when she called for his attention.

"Lex, I think the venue for the event... is going to end up being too small. We're also going to need more temporary staff to handle the influx of new guests."

"Oh? How come? Did we end up getting a lot of participants?"

'A lot' was a relative term, and Mary didn't know what Lex was expecting. When he only advertised briefly on only three planets, he had tens of thousands of guests, so he should have adjusted for the Inn's new reach, right?

"Not too many. Due to Audrey handling things on Earth, we only have about 30,000 contestants from there and Mars combined. Due to various other restrictions as well, such as sex, age, and the requirement for a physical body, the number of contestants was also dropped to about only 2.6 million. After -" Mary had to stop giving her report because Lex, who had been leaning against a wall when he heard the report, slipped and fell, attracting the attention of Cwenhild and their teammates.

"Excuse me, I'll be right back," Lex said quickly as he quickly got up and rushed to the toilet.

"Repeat that again! How many contestants do we have?"

"Approximately 2.6 million," Mary replied calmly. "After having a discussion with the marketing and publicity manager Audrey has hired for the event, we came to the conclusion that the low turnout is due to a lack of trust or recognition of the pageant in the universe. After the first one airs, and people become familiar with the brand, turnout should be much higher. Of course, we can keep the participants in their rooms while it's not their turn, and thus manage them. But we can't force the guests to stay in their rooms all the time. Some of them will want to view the event in person."

"Mary, did you say... there are 2,600,000 contestants in the beauty pageant?"

"Yes. It's a good thing Audrey was in charge on sifting through the applicants from Earth, otherwise, if everyone who applied was able to participate, we would have tens of millions of contestants during the first portion of the event."

After he recovered from the initial shock, Lex's mind started working in overdrive and he quickly realized he had been underestimating the allure of a model on a catwalk. Leaving the bathroom, he promptly told Cwenhild that he had some urgent business he needed to take care of, and left.

On his journey back to his apartments, he continued to listen to Mary's briefing. It was tough to estimate how many guests there would be for this event, but Mary informed Lex that... the Iron Heart pirates had bought several million keys from them the last few weeks.

Honestly, the pirates hard work needed to be commended. It was not easy to travel to so many star systems in such a short time. Not only had they divided their crew into various, smaller groups to advertise to as many systems as possible, they had been working nonstop. After all, there was no such thing as a repeat customer for them. Once their customer visited the Inn a single time, they would be able to get their own keys. So, to make money, they worked nonstop.

Lex momentarily considered hiring the pirate crew before dismissing the thought. He had other things to focus on for now. As soon as he reached home, a particular gleam filled his eyes.

If Lex were a cartoon, his eyes would have transformed into giant dollar signs, as the capitalist in him had woken up once again - now with added authority.

First and foremost, Lex checked how much MP he currently had. Over the past few weeks, due to the increased number of guests, his income had seen a small boost. During this time, he had made a decent 400,000 MP. Considering how cheap his rooms, services and food were, this figure spoke volumes about the number of guests he'd had. That left him with a total of 7,311,000 MP.

It had been a while since Lex went on a crazy spending spree. He cracked his knuckles and got to work.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 290: Lex's first

The burden the Inn was about to be placed under was immense. The most guests it had had at its peak was a few tens of thousands. Going from that to a few million was a massive jump, and the Inn lacked the infrastructure to manage such demand. A lot of temporary solutions would be available in the event management panel, but the foundation of the Inn itself would also require an upgrade.

First things first, Lex had to upgrade his supply for spiritual food, which would require an upgrade of the greenhouse. Speaking of which, it had been many months now since the greenhouse had been completely overhauled, and the gardeners 'art' was really beginning to show.

The way the plants grow, the way the bushes create outlines, the shading of the various kinds of grass as well as the growing vegetables, all came together to form an image of Little Blue when seen from above. But even so, the image was not fully formed. Suddenly, Lex felt like he really had been wasting the gardener's talents.

After thinking on it for a moment, Lex bought 10 more permanent workers and put the gardener in charge of them. Instead of taking care of the greenhouse, Lex let him take care of the greenery around the Midnight Manor. Having him take care of the entire Inn would require too many workers.

The workers cost him 35,000 MP and setting aside their salary for the next three months cost him another 16,000 MP. Being given a job where he only needed to care for the aesthetics and presentation dramatically improved the gardeners mood.

After that, Lex spent another 100,000 MP on increasing the size of the greenhouse by 10 acres. The turtle would remain in charge of growing food and now, without the gardener focusing on using the plants to supplement his art, he would be able to focus on maximum sustainable productivity.

Now, he turned his attention to the Inn. Quite frankly, with the current size of the Inn, it was impossible to fit several million people here, let alone tens of millions, without severely crowding the entire place.

He turned his attention to Main street. As much as he wanted to avoid this initially, it was inevitable. He created a street branching off, henceforth known as Avalon street for that was the first building in it, and created 4 more high rises of similar size. Since the Avalon had cost him 300,000 MP, adding 4 more took up 1.2 million MP.

He created more branches off Main street, and added another Battle tower, full of Training rooms. On another street, he created a temple similar to the Blue Mosque in design, and filled it with Meditation rooms. He had to create several more restaurants as well, and overall expanded Main street several times its size. All of these expenses took up another 200,000 MP, and hiring all the relevant staff, which was about another 100 workers, cost him a devastating 510,000 MP which included hiring them, giving them living quarters and setting aside their pay for the next three months.

He spent another 2 million MP on increasing the size of the Inn by another 200 acres, and filled the area with countless small, lone cabins as well as smaller settlements. Previously, the biggest rental room he could build was a courtyard, which had 4 individual rooms.

Now, taking advantage of his increased authority, he could also build small houses, large houses, mansions and a small village! These were not the houses and villages Lex built on his own, but rather rental units backed by the system, meaning they could only be rented by a single person or group.

The small house charged 600 MP a night, and had five bedrooms, each with their own restroom, a lounge, a living room, a small store room and a kitchen.

The large house charged 2000 MP a night, and had eight bedrooms, a lounge, two living rooms, an empty basement, a large kitchen, a single meditation room and a small swimming pool. Though the meditation room was a part of the house, to use it would cost its usual daily fee of 100 MP a day.

A mansion... was about half the size of the Midnight Manor, had 12 rooms, a conference room, a lounge, a couple of living rooms, a basement, 2 kitchens, 3 meditation rooms, 3 training rooms, 1 recovery room, a massive swimming pool, a massive backyard and a dedicated butler. Lex decided to keep the rent for the mansion at 5000 MP a night. It need not be said that the mansion, as well as the houses, afforded total privacy and no one would be able to peek in, even if you were in the backyard.

The small village consisted of 5 courtyards, 3 small houses, 2 large houses and a single mansion, its own restaurant, its own team of dedicated workers, a massive open ground and a small monument in the center of the village. Since Lex could customize the monument, he decided to shape it after the Galactic Sovereign turtle. Again, it needed to be mentioned that, despite its size and capacity, this village could not be rented by the house or courtyard, but had to be rented collectively by a person or group. Lex decided to set the rent of the small village at 15,000 MP a night.

This was technically, not actually the limit of what he could build, as there were still options after a small village, but at this point they were getting too expensive for him to place as he still needed to save MP for the actual event management itself. In the end, he ended up spending 500,000 MP on placing the various rooms, courtyards, houses and villages.

This left him with 2,750,000 MP remaining. To be honest, he had not even come close to making enough arrangements for dealing with millions of people, but that would have to wait for when he started earning money from this event. Since the Inn was a part in organizing the event as well, instead of only hosting it, all further payments for the event that Brandon was supposed to make were deferred and instead, a percentage of the income generated from the event itself would go towards the Inn.

To be clear, this did not count any profit the Inn made by renting out rooms or giving out services. Only the income generated from aspects directly related to the event would count as earnings from the event, and Mary had negotiated a hefty 80% share in the Inns favor for the income. In her words, she had been very generous even leaving them with 20% of the profits.

Whether it was generous or not, when Lex saw the various ways in which they expected to earn from the event he was extremely satisfied.

He spent another 200,000 MP on enlarging the venue. If this was a permanent building, it would cost much more, but since it was only temporary, this was more than enough to enlarge the building enough to seat 500,000 people. He could continue to enlarge the building, but after a certain point it just became ridiculous to expand further. He told Mary to think of ways in which they could comfortably seat more people.

Then, he spent 1,500,000 MP on event security! The last time, he had spent 450,000 MP and had gotten 10 Earth Immortals guards and a few hundred below that level. This time, he was looking forward to what he got.

Still, Mary told him not to expect too much. The reason his bodyguard has been so powerful last time was because he had spent all that money on one individual. Since this time the amount was spread amongst various guards, they likely wouldn't be at that level.

As it turned out, she was right. 2000 Golden Core peak guards, 200 Nascent peak guards, 30 Peak Earth Immortals guards, and 1 guard at the realm above Earth Immortal were summoned from a flash of golden light. Lex found it interesting that even with his increased authority, he could not see above the Earth immortal realm. Yet what he found even more interesting was that he recognized many of these guards!

They were the same ones he had summoned last time during the Midnight Games. It seemed like the system was getting these guards from a specific place. That was something Lex needed to remember, for it was another clue into understanding the system and how it worked. It was also important to note that, up until Earth Immortal, all guards were humans, but the guard above it was not.

As for the species of the strongest guard? With brown scales as smooth as polished metal covering its reptilian body, four wings that spanned a hundred feet (30 meters) each, claws that could rip through a moon and a maw as rugged as it was malevolent, Lex did not even need to scan to recognize a dragon. The first he had ever seen.