

Innkeeper 33

Chapter 33: Eavesdropping

Slowly, Falak made his way towards the Innkeeper as he used his spirit sense to investigate the area. Spirit sense was an ability those at a higher cultivation level attained that would allow them to perceive things in the greatest of details which were covered by their spirit sense. They could extract and withdraw their spiritual senses and use it to cover anything that was within their spiritual range. There were, of course, more uses to spiritual sense but that was the most common one. He was surprised to see there were a few changes in the Inn as well as new people - something he had not sensed at all from his room. This, along with the fact that he was not able to determine the Innkeepers strength, made the Midnight Inn extremely mysterious. Yet it did not matter much to Falak; he was not there to make enemies with the man so his strength mattered little, only his capability as a host did.

As for the two other guests, they were too weak to hide anything from him, and he immediately saw through them. In fact, from the moment Falak had been born he was already much stronger than the two soldiers, so he did not even have a concept for what the Qi Training realm was. In terms of strength they were virtually indistinguishable from the mortals who did not cultivate at all to him.

"Innkeeper," Falak said in an acknowledging tone. "There have been a few changes to the Inn while I was sleeping. I'm surprised you were able to achieve such a thing without even letting me notice."

Lex felt like if the Host Attire wasn't helping him control his facial features his lip would have twitched. The man had been asleep this whole time?

"Of course," he replied, as if it was the most natural thing. "All our guest rooms have an isolating array so that no one outside can sense what is happening inside, while those inside remain undisturbed by things outside. Naturally, if you want to turn the array off you can let me know and I can have it done for you."

That statement surprised Falak. He had not noticed any arrays in his room at all!

"No wonder I was unable to contact the young lady through the communication talisman, the rooms are isolated. In that case, please remove the arrays around my room. It would be a shame if the young lady tried to contact me, but was unable to."

Lex nodded and used his control over the Inn to deactivate the isolating power over the rooms. In fact, there were no arrays covering the rooms, the Inn naturally kept the rooms isolated but it was easier to explain to guests this way.

"It's done," Lex told, his mind running through a million things. For a moment he considered asking Falak about the Earth the same way he had the two soldiers, but then disregarded the idea. The less he revealed to Falak and Bastet the easier it would be to keep up his façade in front of them.

"These two young friends," Falak said, turning to Chen and Blane. "I can sense the aura of the Vegus System on you. It has been quite a while since I was there last. Would you mind telling me about what's been happening there lately? I have been quite cut off from the universe lately."

The man's words overwhelmed and intimidated the two soldiers, but it wasn't just that. He was infinitely stronger than the two and exuded a natural aura that should have overwhelmed them being so close. It was not something he would have had to do, just the strength of the man existing before them should have crushed their souls - though they didn't know that, they only knew that they should have been oppressed and that something was preventing them from suffering. It was the Inn, naturally protecting its guests, but the two soldiers attributed it to the Innkeeper helping them out.

"Senior I don't know when you came last, but for almost two hundred years now Vegus Minima has been overrun by zombies. As for the other two planets, we lost communication with them long ago and don't know what their status is. They are probably in the same situation, if not worse."

"Zombies?" Falak repeated the unfamiliar term, slightly curious.

"Bottom level demons," Lex clarified, repeating the information he had received from the Inn.

"Ah, bottom level demons!" Falak grimaced for a moment, but quickly his expression returned to normal. "I'm sorry my young friends, I would like to help you - demons are truly despicable - but according to the Henali Convention I am unable to interfere. You will have to deal with this on your own."

The two soldiers smiled wryly - they did not expect any help anyway. The Innkeeper had already let them know that their fate was in their own hands, and could only be changed through their own efforts.

"Thank you for your care senior," Chen said, "although we have suffered, we are not without hope. We will reclaim our planet through our own efforts."

Chen was only trying to portray himself as heroic, but his words truly gave Falak a good impression of the man.

"Come young friends, tell me a little more about these zombies."

Falak led the two soldiers to the restaurant where they sat and discussed zombies and everything else about their world, while ordering a truly tremendous amount of food. Falak turned out to be vegetarian, but instead of salads he ordered a list of Indian foods while the two soldiers had steak. As a reliable A.I. assistant, Velma would take care of the cooking like she had been doing for Lex this entire time.

Lex left them to their privacy so they could talk - but not really! How could he give up this opportunity to learn interesting things from them - mostly Falak since he had already interviewed the soldiers. For example, this Henali Convention, although Lex had no idea what it was, he knew it was something that prevented Falak from helping the two soldiers - maybe that information would be useful one day. Sitting comfortably in the garden he used the power of the Host Attire to secretly listen to everything his three guests were saying.

Upstate New York, Will Bentham's Mansion

Old man Will sat in a wheelchair looking at the kneeling young mercenary in front of him. He had been thinking of solutions to his problem as of late, and suddenly remembered a rumor he had heard once. Death soldiers. Soldiers trained to sacrifice themselves for a cause. A lot of families and organizations cultivated them, and they were only loyal to them. But there was another way someone could get a death soldier, and that was by wielding the endless, unsurmountable power of money! Okay putting it like that was an exaggeration, but occasionally some cultivators who were in desperate need sometimes agreed to bind themselves to others in exchange for what they needed. The binding was done through a soul contract, which in itself was a rare item, but a very useful one as it gave the binder the power of life or death over the bonded person. But still, such a situation was rare.

Will called a few old friends to put the word out he was looking for a Death soldier. Initially he expected to wait a few months at the very least to get a response, but who knew he got a call just one day later. In front of him was a young mercenary who had made a small name for himself doing expeditions on the moon. Unfortunately, the cultivation world is not a peaceful one and someone had killed the soldier's family while he was away on one of his expeditions.

It had been a few years since that incident but try as he might, the mercenary was unable to find out who the culprit was and what was their motive. On the moon things were a lot more chaotic than on Earth, for example while Bluebird tried its best to maintain the peace and investigate any crimes in its designated areas of control, there was no such law enforcing organization on the moon. There each and everyone only looked out for themselves and their own interests. So the man had finally turned to desperate measures. He agreed to become old man Will's death soldier as long as he helped him investigate his family's death and help him with his revenge.

"I have given the order. The Bentham family has officially started looking into the death of your family, quietly for now - to avoid attracting attention. I will let you know as soon as there are any results."

"Thank you, my lord," the kneeling mercenary replied. "I will fulfill my end of the bargain."

Will smiled, hearing the young man's words. He waved his hand and a man dressed up in a suit brought what looked like an empty syringe to the kneeling mercenary and handed it to him. Without any hesitation the mercenary stabbed himself in his heart with the needle of the syringe and pulled the plunger outwards. However the syringe didn't pull out any blood, instead it was filled with a silvery translucent material. The process looked painful and the man grunted a couple of times, but did not stop. Once he was done the mercenary handed the syringe back to the suited man, who then presented it to Will.

Will carefully picked it up and injected the silvery substance into his hand. When he finished a small tattoo that looked like the mercenary before him appeared on the back of Will's hand. The soul contract was complete and the mercenary had handed a small portion of his soul to old man Will. Naturally, Will did not have complete control over the mercenary's soul, as the conditions of the contract had been imprinted into the syringe used to extract and deliver the soul. If Will tried to force the mercenary to do anything outside of the bounds of the agreed upon contract he would immediately lose control of the small piece of soul and it would dissipate. Similarly, if the mercenary tried to break his word or go against Will, the soul contract would immediately alert Will who could then punish the mercenary.

"Now then," Will said, excitement filling his body, "I believe you know your assignment."

He presented the golden key to the mercenary, who took the key and immediately crushed it. There was no hesitation in his actions or fear in his eyes. The man was willing to do whatever it took to get revenge. There was a flash in the room and the mercenary disappeared.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 34: Hugo

Hugo Laurent was a self made man even though his life had never been easy. But he was not one to make excuses and always worked towards improving himself. Despite his lack of resources and backing, on Earth he was considered a cultivation genius and the rate of his growth drew many eyes. Eventually he joined the Deepwater Brotherhood, an organization similar to a private military that operated on the Moon and accepted various tasks too difficult or dangerous for ordinary cultivators. It was not the best treatment he could have gotten, but he could accept tasks as and when he liked and had relative freedom, as well as the protection of the Brotherhood as long as he didn't proactively offend someone. During his years working he built up a small fortune and started a family. With the way things were going he could imagine himself retiring early and returning to Earth. But when have things ever gone according to plan?

Hugo dismissed his random thoughts and prepared for the worst as the flash faded and he found himself in a new environment. He was wearing synthetic body armor from head to toe and held what looked like an assault rifle positioned across his chest with a bayonet at its end. At his waist was what looked like a pistol, as well as an extremely sharp blade. In a small bag that was hung from his back he carried emergency medical equipment, as well as a few lightweight items that could prove useful in a difficult situation. He looked like a man ready for war, so he stood out like a sore thumb in his new environment.

He found himself at the gate of what looked like a large estate. It gave off a warm and welcoming feeling, but Hugo would not let that fool him as he did not let down his guard. Having people drop their guard through a welcoming environment was a common tactic in various minor realms he had visited, though this did not seem like a minor realm. His primary mission in this place was to collect as much information as he could, and his secondary mission was to recover any treasures he could find. Therefore he scanned the area around him and made sure to memorize even the smallest of details.

Before he could think of doing much else, a mysterious man suddenly appeared before him. Hugo's eyes shrunk in horror as he had only heard rumors of teleportation in very high level cultivators, but had never seen it. He tensed up and got ready for an altercation, but did not make any sudden movements. He did not want to provoke the other without understanding the situation first.

"Welcome to the Midnight Inn, dear guest," the mysterious man said with a smile. His voice had a magical effect, and made Hugo want to naturally trust him. But the feeling of wanting to trust him alarmed Hugo even more!

"Be at ease," the man said, laughing at Hugo's tense demeanor. "We are a reputable establishment. We do not hurt our guests. Would you like a tour?"

"Sure," replied Hugo curtly. He let go of his assault rifle and let it hang from its strap, but remained ready at any moment to use it. The mysterious man had an amused look in his eye, but said nothing as he led him towards a manor in the distance.

"The Midnight Inn is an establishment that is connected to many worlds across the universe. We provide our guests with a rare place to rest and relax, away from their troubles. Of course, we provide services other than residence as well. Currently we only have a small gift shop with a few items from different worlds, and a recovery room to allow guests to heal from various injuries, but over time we will include more options. By the way, it seems I forgot to introduce myself. You can call me the Innkeeper, I run this small establishment."

The Innkeeper's explanation seemed far fetched and Hugo instinctually felt like it was impossible, how can there be an Inn that connects to various worlds across the universe. Then he remembered that he entered this place by teleporting using a golden key, and that made him a little unsure.

During the tour, when they entered the restaurant he saw three people sitting at a table being served food by a young lady, discussing in great detail about the history of some place called Vegus Prime. He instantly recognized that two of those people were in the Qi Training realm, but the third man gave him an oppressive feeling like he'd never felt before. Without any doubt Hugo knew this man was the strongest being he'd ever met, but he was just sitting casually eating what looked like a Spinach dish with some Naan. A part of Hugo told him that this was all an illusion, that the Innkeeper was still trying to fool him, but a much greater part told him that he was not qualified to be fooled by such a man.

When he accepted the reality of what was happening, his mindset changed immediately! He dropped his guard completely and paid greater attention to everything around him. In theory, the place seemed like a simple estate, and not even the most impressive one Hugo had seen. But in practice, everything around him made him feel like he was in a mystical place. While walking through the garden towards the recovery room, Hugo instantly realized that his cultivation seemed to have loosened up a bit, and it once again was possible for him to progress. That truly shocked him since he hadn't even been here for thirty minutes!

"I recommend you spend a day in our recovery pod," the Innkeeper told Hugo when they visited the recovery room. "You don't have any obvious injuries, but I can see that you have various hidden injuries in your body that haven't fully recovered and have hampered your cultivation. Once you heal them, you will notice that the speed of your cultivation will increase exponentially."

Hugo thought for a minute, and analyzed his situation. Everything he encountered was vastly different from what he expected going into this, but his mission parameters were to get as much information as possible. Using the recovery pod fulfilled and determining its effectiveness fell into that category, right?

Hugo stopped hesitating and pulled his small backpack forward and unzipped it. He reached in, and pulled out what could possibly be the most powerful weapon he had ever wielded: Will Bentham's credit card!

"Do you accept cards?" he asked.

"Naturally," the Innkeeper replied.

Lex smiled as he allowed the Inn to swipe the card in Hugo's room. The man didn't even ask the price, and this was exactly the kind of customer Lex liked the most. Using the recovery room cost the Inn 30MP a day, so Lex had set the price as 50MP. Using the recovery pod a day cost the Inn 150MP, so he set the price as 250MP! As for the ORR, it cost the Inn 1000MP per hour! Lex hadn't determined a price for that yet, and would consider it when he needed to.

The payment was accepted and Lex led the man to the recovery pod. Above his head Lex could see his details

Name: Hugo Laurent

Power: Middle Foundation realm

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: Not yet available

Below this was a unique set of information that only became available after they entered the recovery room.

Conditions:

- Meridians stretched

- Slightly damaged ribs, spine, skull, left shin, left knee, left arm, left hand

- Intestines slightly damaged

- Liver slightly damaged

- Cardiovascular system slightly damaged

Report:

The patient has accumulated various injuries all over his body that never completely healed. The patient will suffer no deterioration in their quality of life, but will suffer from a negative impact on their cultivation speed. If untreated, the patient will never surpass the Foundation realm. Any attempt to cross the Foundation realm will exacerbate the damage to the body and cause the Foundation cultivation to collapse.

Lex was pleasantly surprised when he saw the information, and was quite thankful he had another way to pull guests into the Inn. Furthermore, he was also filled with anticipation: if Hugo decided to rent a room before the two soldiers left then he would reach maximum capacity, and Lex had a gut feeling that something good would happen if he did.

Lex's smile grew as he watched the fully armored man get in the recovery pod. His luck really was good, and that one key he had left on the train had come in handy just at the right time!