

Innkeeper 351

The Innkeeper

Chapter 351: Screams

Standing on the rooftop, there were numerous thoughts running through his head. He was thinking of his tenants, of the people of the town, of the Noel family, of the killer, of the darkness and, most importantly, about himself.

There was a very subtle feeling in his gut, something much milder than any warning he had ever received from his instincts. He could not exactly identify what it was, and it was so mild in fact, that it was only now that he realized that it had been building up for a while now.

He closed his eyes and tried to focus. He could feel the cold wind running across his body, hear it whispering in his ear like a close friend. He could feel weight. It was the weight of his body, but also of responsibility.

He had with him the ability to shelter the entire town should he wish, but in doing so he would paint a massive target on his back. Maybe, during the darkness no one would target him, or maybe he would be targeted by a few greedy people. He wasn't concerned about that. His concern was the immortals that might become curious if the mysteries surrounding the tavern seemed just a little too far fetched.

With his impressive formation, and the amount of MP he had, he was sure he could survive an immortal coming to the tavern. But if more than one came, or they used some means beyond his understanding, he would be vulnerable. It was best not to enter their sights.

But that more or less meant condemning the town to care for itself. It was a very difficult decision, but fortunately not one he had to make immediately. He didn't know what caused the issue with the formation, and maybe it could be fixed. Moreover, there were too many variables in this uncertain time for him to account for.

After some consideration, he decided to face things as they came. For now, he would not do anything too drastic. But one thing was certain, he had no intentions of taking a single step outside the tavern.

The feeling in his gut... it was like he had accidentally wandered into the territory of a predator. The signs were around him. But he did not know if he was the target. Moreover, it was not just danger he sensed. It was something... more. Something beyond his understanding that was attracting him. It went beyond the scope of treasure or something valuable. It felt like... a piece of his soul that he didn't know he was missing.

It was too confusing to actually understand. Instead, he settled for preparing for the worst.

Having made up his mind, he quickly returned to the main hall, where guests had gathered at the windows and began to panic.

"Ladies and gents," his loud but calm voice blanketed the hall, grabbing everyone's attention. "Before discussing anything else, I would like to assure you that so long as you are within the premises of this tavern, you are completely safe."

He stopped talking for a moment as he continued to descend the stairs, his movements marked with a blinding lack of haste or concern. It was as if he was taking a casual stroll in his own home... which, in a way, he was.

"I am not sure why the lights went out, but I'm sure that the issue will be fixed shortly. Even if it isn't, once again, I have to remind you that the tavern is safe and we have enough food reserves to feed everyone for a long, long time.

"At this time, it is very important that everyone maintain the utmost calm. Have some food, have a few drinks, relax, listen to some music, go take a nap, whatever you want. But do not create a panic."

At this time, the relaxed demeanor Lex had been nurturing as a tavern owner disappeared and his characteristics as the Innkeeper shone through. He was calm and commanding, reassuring everyone while at the same time taking control of the situation. So long as they were inside his tavern, during this emergency period, they would have to listen to his orders.

While the numerous guests calmed down a bit, and began discussing amongst themselves what they thought might have happened, a few approached him with questions. Based on his performance, many assumed that he might have some information on what happened, but unfortunately, he did not. For

now, at least. The Rumor room might provide him with a few ideas of what happened, but that would have to wait.

He went up to Roland, who, despite his young age, seemed to have maintained his composure. Or, at least that's what he displayed upfront. Lex could tell at a glance that the kid was just pretending, so his friends would feel reassured.

"You guys go sit in the private room from last time," Lex told him. "I'll send some food over, and it's on the house, so don't worry. I strongly recommend you do not travel anywhere in the dark. From what I understand, it only takes a few minutes for some of the weaker monsters to form during the darkness."

Roland hesitated, but eventually nodded. It was not obvious to the unobservant, but Roland was actually very proud. He detested taking handouts, and only ever relied on himself for anything he wanted. Even now, he had to struggle to accept Lex's help, and were it not for his friends behind him, he would have struggled even more.

Sending the kids away, he summoned all his employees and temp workers to the kitchen.

"I know everyone might be worried about their families and friends out there," Lex said, looking at the triplets. "And I won't stop anyone who wants to leave, but I don't recommend leaving the tavern. The mayor is probably working on a solution as we speak, and things might get better soon. But in case they don't staying here is the best solution."

Hena and the rest of the spoilt kids had gone completely pale and they were panicking too hard to think clearly. They wanted nothing more than to return to the safety of their homes, but at the same time, they were too afraid to traverse the darkness.

Lex didn't particularly care for them. It might sound harsh, but while Lex had a newly emerging sense of protectiveness, it only extended to his employees and guests. He would of course not throw them out to fend for themselves, but they would get no pity or leniency from him.

After the triplets, despite their extreme distraught states, decided on staying at the tavern, Lex continued.

"We don't know how long this will last, but I believe in preparing for the worst. Follow me."

He led them to a remote corner of the kitchen and moved a table, revealing a hatch in the floor.

He decided to use the system and added a couple of secret underground rooms, pretending as if he had them hidden all along. One set of secret rooms, entered through the kitchen, would be for his employees to live at. He created another one with a secret entrance right in the main hall, hidden behind the bar. It was not massive, but it could accommodate a few more people in case the situation developed to them requiring refugees.

He opened the hatch and climbed down the dimly lit vertical stairs, revealing a corridor with 5 small rooms.

He assigned one to Big Ben and Betty, and the triplets shared another. Roan and Rick, who had previously been living in the backyard, would also take a room each, to keep up appearances.

Once everyone got familiar with the rooms, they returned to the ground floor and everyone continued with their jobs. Betty began cooking, because it would be lunch time soon and because eating would temporarily distract people.

Lex sent Big Ben to his neighbors bakery to summon Dino and his wife over. Since the street seemed to be empty, of both people and monsters, it took him but a couple of minutes.

The baker and his wife accepted the offer and quickly came over. As neighbors, they naturally heard about the speciality of the tavern, and were too afraid to remain in their own bakery. Strangely though, none of the other shop owners on the street came over. Lex didn't bother extending the invite either, for he didn't want Big Ben going too far.

After the first half an hour, which was spent making minor preparations and passing out instructions, Lex ran out of things to do. All there really was to do was wait now. Wait and hope to either see the lights or the town guard patrolling the streets.

Unfortunately, the first person Lex saw on his street was not a guard, but a corpse than had been thrown out of a building. The loud sound of a body crashing through a wall attracted everyone's attention, just in time to watch a long, bony... thing emerge from a house.

It looked more like an abstract piece of art than a creature. That did not, however, stop it from emitted a howl that shattered countless windows on Bakers street.

The howl was followed by screams.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 352: Lunch is served

It had been nearly a year since the Midnight Inn first appeared, and regardless of its apparent popularity, on a universal scale, it was not even equivalent to a blip. First of all, a majority of all living beings in existence were simply not destined to ever make use of the Inn because it would take months of savings to accumulate even 1 MP.

Second of all, despite its excellent services, they simply had no need for it. Even if one wanted a vacation, traveling somewhere local made more sense than some remote area in the universe.

Among certain crowds, however, its popularity was spreading. This crowd mostly contained Foundation realm and Golden core realm cultivators. The price was steep but acceptable, and the services were truly unmatched by anything on their planets. Moreover, the entertainment was excellent.

But while this crowd made up the majority of the guests the Inn received, there was another strata of universal beings taking note of the Inn. This consisted of those who kept tabs on rumors of any and all Daolords, and the latest rumor was of an unknown Daolord behind the scenes at the Inn. Credibility was added to this rumor when the devil known as Loretta let it slip that she strongly suspected it was true.

For the people who did not know the weight of her words, they meant nothing. For those that did, it changed everything.

In the Milky Way Galaxy,, on a spaceship traveling at full speed across the stars, a man was hung in the air by chains that pierced into his collarbone. His legs had been chopped off clean, and his body was covered in brutal scars, but his hands and his face were not harmed in the slightest.

This man was known as Mr. Jeckal, and was the instigator behind the Raskal attack on the Midnight Inn. His life had been just peachy up until recently, when the organization backing him learned of the rumor about the Midnight Inn. Upon hiring independent investigators, unrelated to the organization, they learnt that not only was the Inn unharmed by their small skirmish, they had a very mysterious backer.

Although this organization could afford to mess with the William family, messing with a Daolord was out of the question. But, considering the fact that there was no retaliation, they assumed that the Daolord could not be bothered with them.

They did, however, need to punish Mr. Jeckal so that he would rein in his arrogance and stop offending anymore people unnecessarily. They had humored him this much because of his unique ability, but it wasn't worth being destroyed over.

"That's enough rest," echoed a voice from the dark. "Let's continue your punishment."

If the rumor about a Daolord had spread so far that even simple organizations could discover it, then the larger ones would also soon be in the know. The matter of fact was that as soon as the Jotun royal family gained a certain level of surety in the matter, they spread the news in the relevant circles.

It may seem like those larger organizations hadn't taken any action, but it was only because they operated on a universal scale. Let alone less than a year, even 10,000 years was a short time frame for them.

But, the preliminary process had already begun, and today, they officially began acknowledging the Inns' existence.

With a flash of light, several humanoid beings appeared at the Inn at the same time. If one were to judge them based on the myths and lores from Earth, they looked like a Devil, an Angel, an Elf, a Dwarf, some unknown being of which there were no myths, and a human.

They looked at one another silently while contemplating something.

Finally, the Angel spoke.

"6 beings from 6 different galaxies, but we arrived at the exact same time. This is unlike any teleportation I am familiar with."

"You do not need to be familiar," spoke the Devil in a matter of fact way. "You only need to do your job. Remember, Angel, we are only here as messengers. Do not provoke trouble, for us Devils have been ordered not to provoke the Midnight Inn."

"I see a dragon," said the elf, ignoring the existing conversation.

"It has the mark of the Condottiere. If the Inn needs to hire security, maybe they do not have strong manpower," said the dwarf.

"Stop probing lest you offend someone," said the being from the unknown race.

"Too late," replied the Elf.

They looked up into the sky and saw a baby whale, swimming through the skies. Walking slowly beneath it was a large turtle with a single horn protruding from its head. At first, the group did not pay much attention because it was weak. Then they recognized its race, and froze!

"Crap," said the human, ready to escape. This was much scarier than a dragon. But the turtle paid them no attention at all, and just kept moving. After all, it was completely normal for new guests to scan the Inn with their spirit sense. He was already used to it.

Only after it left did the 6 humanoid beings, all on the verge of becoming Immortals, finally breathe. Even if they became actual Immortals, they would not be insane enough to offend a being with the word Sovereign right in the name of its race.

The creature's howl was the signal that ushered in chaos. From stunning silence to the sounds of shattering glass everywhere, followed by bitter screams. The situation should not have been as bad as it was, since these creatures were relatively weak and everyone was a cultivator.

To be specific, Lex couldn't see how good or bad the situation was, since most of the fights were happening inside the various buildings. For a moment Lex thought it was because of the sudden fear of the dark but then a thought struck him like thunder.

This was the Crystal realm, not Earth. This may have been Lex's first time encountering darkness like this here, but it should not have been the case for the citizens. They should have been mentally prepared to encounter an accident at any time. Yet nothing he saw indicated that even a single person was attempting to fight back.

Something was very wrong, and it wasn't just the abrupt shut down of the light formation. Something was elevating everyone's fear and preventing them from thinking clearly. At first when Lex saw everyone feel afraid he thought it was the natural reaction, but now it seemed that it wasn't.

Moreover, they weren't the only ones affected! Even Lex's first reaction to the darkness was one of fear. He lost his composure easily and even began fearing being attacked by immortals. While his thought process was logical, Lex was not someone so easily frightened anymore. He had overcome too many unforeseen obstacles to be afraid of something that 'might' happen.

Lex thought of several ways he could test his theory, but that would have to wait for later. Mentally using the system, he outfitted the rooftop with an extremely strong light and turned it on, pointing it towards the sky.

Not only did it brighten up the surrounding area, it stood as a beacon in the dark, signaling everyone to come here. As for the consequences if he attracted too much attention?

He would deal with it when the matter arose. Worst comes to worst, he could claim his dad was an immortal. It wouldn't be the first time someone in the Crystal realm would believe that anyway.

But while he could attract attention with light, that was about all he could do. Even though the monsters formed now were weak and he could face them, something strange was going on and he was not enough of a saint to risk his life for strangers.

The weird bony monster that let out the howl looked directly towards Lex after it finished with its first meal. The guests in the hall were immediately frightened, and fell backwards, but Lex remained standing.

As if provoked, the monster lurched towards Lex. But, before it could even get close to the window in front of which Lex was standing, it froze. It had entered the boundary of the tavern when it crossed the small garden in front, and was thus within the space formation. Lex put it in a room of the exact shape of its body, and then squeezed.

The monster blew up, unable to even touch the tavern building. Lex looked on as if he had seen something unremarkable.

In fact, he was no longer paying attention to the street. He was discussing contingency measures with Mary, and using the system scan constantly to monitor the tavern. After all, they would not be polite enough to only attack from the front. He had to keep an eye out on all sides.

Upon seeing the monster explode the guests were slightly reassured.

Bang! The kitchen door slammed open, startling everyone, but instead of monsters, it revealed the triplets walking out with trays of food.

"Lunch is served," said Naki with a smile.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 353: Epistle

The six humanoid beings toured the Inn separately, for though they had the same objective and represented the same organization, the differences ingrained in them due to their races kept them from truly working together. The Devil had the easiest time, for he simply walked to the stall the devils had set up at the Inn in their attempts to make deals with various beings from various worlds.

The devils were one of the richest races in the Origin realm, and while their uncanny control over demons was a major source of wealth, their never ending enterprising mentality also played a huge role.

The others either explored on their own or took their personal holograms as guides to fully understand everything about the Inn. Most aspects of the Inn were very normal to them, since their experience was extremely vast. Yet a few things still stood out to them here and there. The Mystery trial was one unique building they could not fully understand, though they could not try it themselves, for it was one of the most popular attractions and always had a line. Another was the way the Lady Cosmos competition was being broadcast so randomly throughout the Origin realm. A rather important one was how the Inn was cut off from the rest of the Origin realm. They could not communicate with anyone outside the Inn while inside it - something they had special equipment for.

All in all, the Inn seemed very ordinary on the surface most of the time, but once in a while it would let slip its specialness.

After their judgment, they regrouped, and made a joint request to meet with the Innkeeper. As Lex was not available, they ended up meeting Mary, as had been the case with everyone who wanted to meet the Innkeeper since Lex left.

"How may I be of assistance?" Mary asked politely as she observed the 6 guests. Though she could not scan them, a glance was all that was required to determine that they were of unusual origins.

Unexpectedly, of the 6 races, it was the human that stepped forward and spoke. "Would it be possible to meet the Innkeeper? We represent a special organization we believe the Innkeeper would be most interested in."

"The Innkeeper has left the Inn on some important business. I cannot say when he will be

back, as I do not know, but you can deliver your message to me and I can directly transmit it to him."

The six were not surprised at being unable to meet the Innkeeper, for how could it be possible to meet a Daolord at a simple request? In fact, it was not even their objective to meet the Innkeeper. Their only job was to initiate contact between their organization and the Innkeeper, and what followed afterwards was none of their concern.

"In that case, I would like to officially present to you, for the Innkeeper, an invitation to the Henali assembly."

The human withdrew from his robe an epistle with the word 'Henali' embossed in purple on the envelope.

"The esteemed Innkeeper can attend at his discretion, and will officially be welcomed as a member of the assembly at the time of his attendance. Of course, it goes without saying that the Innkeeper can maintain his anonymity during the entire process and no one will try to pry into his personal matters. At the same time, I bring on behalf of the assembly a small welcome gift to the Origin realm for the Innkeeper, as well as a copy of the Henali conventions should he wish to peruse."

The elf stepped forward and revealed a small, wooden treasure chest.

For the sake of his guests, Lex put a small illusion formation over the windows so that they would be unable to see the monsters outside, or hear their gruesome screams.

The truth was Lex expected an influx of refugees after his beacon lit up the dark sky, but not a single person arrived. Hours later, the sounds of fighting and screaming on Bakers street disappeared and only a deluge of monsters remained, all charging towards the tavern building.

The ease with which Lex killed them told him that they should barely be equivalent to the Foundation realm in strength, yet somehow none of the residents were able to overcome them. More than the monsters, it was the mystery of what was affecting everyone that scared Lex.

But now that he knew that something was artificially enhancing his fear and trying to disparage his mental faculties, he did his best to not let it affect him. His thinking cap helped greatly in this regard.

In the town if Lex was able to realize this, so were many others. The town guard, consisting of soldiers who would regularly see battle, had honed instincts and excellent battle awareness, so that even if they were afraid, they could hold their own wherever they were. Naturally the five nobles, Mario Ricci and

the mayor all were just too strong to fall to enemies of this level, and were able to not only protect themselves but also their nearby subordinates.

This way, a few pockets of survivors and resistance were formed within the city formed of either battle hardened soldiers and mercenaries or nascent level cultivators. All of them saw the giant beacon of light, and while they did not know what it meant, started guiding their survivors that way.

But they weren't the only ones who saw the beacon. So did the killer. But instead of being enraged by the clear indicator of survivors, he grinned with glee. As silent and deadly as an assassin, the killer moved through the darkness, one by one picking off any love survivors heading towards the light.

This was too much fun! Just too much fun!

His sight was not at all hindered by the darkness, for as the wielder of the Murder System, he was uniquely equipped for the task.

In contrast to the deathly desperation engulfing the city, the tavern hall was filled with light and soothing accordion music. The kids, those that came with the guests as well as Rolands friends, were all sitting in a private room playing a bunch of board games Lex magically produced.

The adults all sat in the hall which crowded the room considerably, but they were just too afraid to go into their rooms and be alone. The triplets were serving a soothing green tea which acted as a mild sedative to calm their minds and keep them from overreacting to anything.

Big Ben had to retreat, for all the energy he accumulated in his body from the various drinks he had at the tavern finally caused him to have a breakthrough. Betty was cooking in the kitchen, along with Dino who was baking pies.

Lex had done his best to keep everyone busy so that their minds would remain occupied and would spend less time thinking about the disaster occurring outside. Rick and Roan were the only ones who didn't need to be distracted, for they had unwavering faith in the tavern owner.

Only Lex himself stood still, facing Bakers street while standing on the rooftop. He was looking out for any signs of survivors, but he only saw monsters. Speaking of which, it was a good thing that he had set an illusion formation, or the guests would never be able to calm down.

After all, in the short period since the monsters appeared, Lex had killed over 3000 monsters that attacked the tavern, with even more visible from where he stood. Things were glum.

But, in that moment of dread, Lex heard a familiar sound - the sound of a system notification.

New Quest: Host a Henali assembly at the Midnight Inn

Quest Reward: Subject to success of assembly

Remarks: Maybe if you had friends, you could have hosted them. Instead, you can settle for hosting the oldest geezers in the realm

New Quest: Have the Midnight Inn officially recognized by the Henali assembly

Quest Reward: Guest Registry

Remarks: You're getting fat

Lex was surprised, for he was expecting to get a quest related to the events happening in Babylon, but this was completely unrelated. In fact, he had to scan the Inn to understand what had triggered the quest.

But the 6 representatives who came to deliver the epistle and gifts did not stay long to elaborate, and bid their farewell.

He asked Mary if she knew anything about them, but the system provided her with no knowledge regarding anything they said. Lex was more or less completely in the dark about what the assembly even was.

When he asked her to open the epistle, she was unable. In fact, she was unable to open any of the items left behind.

Lex sighed and told her to put them away. These were destined to be just two more quests that would sit in his system collecting dust for a long time.

An explosion nearby attracted his attention, and Lex finally saw the first survivors heading towards the tavern. It was just two people.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 354: Bazooka

Though it was dark, with Lex's improved eyesight, it was easy for him to see their actions clearly. They were trained warriors, of that there was no doubt, and they had excellent teamwork as well.

They were much stronger than the monsters assaulting them, but there was strength in numbers as well. Moreover, the monsters born of darkness had no set pattern, and so it was difficult to come up with a fixed strategy to face them. Some attacked from afar, and some slithered right at them.

Lex watched silently as they slowly made their way towards the tavern. A few times, he noticed that some monsters were able to sneak up on them and managed to land a few hits. They were mostly unharmed, but that was solely due to their armor, which seemed to have some kind of enchantments.

He mentally added a few spotlights to the top of the tavern and lit up the entire street. He didn't want to put the light directly on the two warriors as that might attract unnecessary attention. Now, instead, with the entire street lit up, it was easier for them to view the monsters.

Calmly he walked down to the main hall and awaited the two warriors' arrival. He was looking forward to any new information they could provide.

A few minutes later the warriors arrived at the front of the tavern, and noticed that as soon as any monster approached the building they would automatically explode. They were hesitant, and even afraid, to approach the tavern out of concern that the same may happen to them, but they had no choice.

Originally things should not have been so bad, but the town's guard had been overrun when they let fear interfere with their duty, and less than a third of them remained. They needed to understand more about this building throwing light into the air.

Such an action not only assured them that this building had a large supply of spirit stones or some other form of energy to carelessly waste, but whatever defensive formation they had in place was still functioning.

The truth was that the town had multiple contingency safe zones and secondary defensive formations in place in the event that the main formation shut down or broke. But when the anomaly with the main formation occurred, it suppressed all other formations within the city. This seemed to be the only one still working. And how could it not? 300 million MP for a formation that only covered a small region and only had the function of manipulating space made it far beyond anything local formations could compete against.

Finally they took a risk and stepped in, and were greatly relieved when nothing happened. Still they did not let down their guard as they stepped in, but not even in their wildest dreams would they have been prepared for what awaited them.

While outside the temperature was well below freezing, a warm cozy breeze blew from the tavern door, accompanied by music and the sound of laughter. A waitress was carrying a tray full of steaming soup across the hall, some of the sailors were playing a dice game while others were playing cards.

A bartender was casually wiping a glass clean while standing ready at his station, awaiting a guest to come with an order.

"Welcome guests," said Lex, when he noticed the men stood frozen at the entrance. "Come in, don't let all the warm air out."

Lex's voice woke the men from their reverie, but also alerted all the guests of the new arrivals. They paused whatever they were doing and turned towards the door. The music stopped, and the room seemed to reach a standstill.

The two men walked in, their gazes fixed on Lex, analyzing the man. Lex was also checking up on them and only retained the most important point - they were in the Golden Core realm.

"Do you happen to know what is happening outside?" Lex asked, his voice as calm and soothing as always. But the two men did not perceive it as so. To them, it sounded like he was completely ignorant of what was going on, and was relying on some kind of backing to keep him safe. They scanned the tavern with their spirit sense to see if they could detect anyone else that was actually a threat.

"We're with the city guard," said one of the men gruffly. "Under orders of the mayor, we're here to investigate the source of light. Give us some food and water, and stop wasting all your spirit stones on useless lights, and stop wasting all this food needlessly. Everyone here will take up arms and obey my orders. As of now, this building is being commandeered as a military checkpoint and you're all conscripted. Promptly prepare everything and in the meantime..."

The man's eyes wandered to Nami, who had been serving soup and just as he was about to say what was on his mind, the man's body shot out of the tavern like a rocket from a bazooka.

His body smashed through dozens of monsters like the strongest artillery fire and even through the front wall of the building on the opposite street. Lex had no idea if the man was alive or dead, and he frankly didn't care.

Lex was more than happy waiting for him to finish before correcting him that the tavern would do no such thing, but the moment he turned his eyes onto Nami, Lex's patience evaporated.

In all fairness, it was entirely possible that he was not about to make an uncouth demand towards Lex's staff, but just the look in his eyes was enough to turn Lex off. Were this the Inn, Lex would have been bound by the system's rules and been unable to do anything until the man actually broke some rules. At the tavern, though, things were a lot more flexible and Lex could do as he pleased.

In this case, what pleased Lex was to manipulate the space around the man and hurl him out of the building like yesterday's trash.

"Please excuse that disturbance," Lex said, with a polite smile towards his guests, before turning back to the other man who had frozen still of his own accord. He still could not understand what had happened, and so did not dare to do anything rash.

"As I asked your companion earlier, do you happen to know what's going on with the town?"

The man did not think too much and obediently began answering.

"Something has gone wrong with the town's array. Instead of keeping the town lit and secure, it's actively suppressing all light formations within and instead of keeping monsters out, has trapped everyone within the town itself. We suspect sabotage, but haven't been able to investigate yet.

"The mayor is trying to rally all the town guards before he begins scouring the town looking for survivors, but because of the suppressed formations, there's no good place to gather everyone. That's when the light from your building appeared, and he tasked us with investigating it. Whether we respond or not, he will be coming here with the gathered soldiers soon enough."

To the warriors disappointment, Lex did not seem bothered by the news of the mayor's arrival, as if he wasn't threatened in any way whatsoever.

"That's great news," said Lex. "I'm glad to see that the mayor is prioritizing the safety of his citizens. The formation's malfunction, though, is troubling news. I have no proof, but my gut tells me this may have something to do with the serial killer on the loose. Do you by chance happen to know the travel paths of any nearby Sol birds? How long can we expect this darkness to last?"

The man grit his teeth and answered truthfully. "It's really hard to predict. Unless the Noel family learns of our plight and makes a move personally, the darkness should last anywhere between one to three months. Unfortunately, all communication with the outside has also been suspended."

Lex nodded as he started making plans. It was best to prepare for the worst case scenario.

The serial killer was frowning hard as he killed another monster. The citizens in the town were dying way too quickly, and most of them to the monsters. This was not satisfying to him. He needed to make a few changes to make the game more fun. Yes, it needed to be even more fun.

He manipulated the formation and created 6 safe zones in the town, where other protective formations weren't suppressed. He needed the people to live. They were supposed to fear him, and die by his hands. The monsters and the darkness were only accompanying characters to his performance. He had to make sure everything was just right.

"System, list down all high value targets in the area. I have to make sure they don't accidentally die.

"Several high value targets are gathered at the beacon of life, and are safe from monster attacks."

"How lucky," he said with a chuckle.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 355: Slimey business

"Now that you've completed your task, do you want to take some time to rest and eat, or will you be returning to finish your report?" asked Lex to the remaining warrior.

The warrior trembled upon hearing the question. Fear of the unknown was the most common thing, and what kind of danger the tavern represented was more or less unknown to the man. He only knew that it was enough to crush him. But, at the same time, returning now, on his own, would present him with a great danger as well.

Eventually he grit his teeth and decided to return to the mayor while the option was still available. He did not dare to hope that the tavern owner would actually provide him with food and rest.

As for going back and checking on his partner? Even if he had survived crashing through hordes of monsters and a building, possibly more than one building actually, he would most likely have been besieged by monsters by now. Even if, by some miracle, he had survived the monster attacks, he would be heavily wounded and his movement impaired. He would be a burden on the return journey, not an asset.

Not wanting to waste another moment, the man quickly departed. His former partner launching out of the building had distracted the nearby monsters sufficiently for him to begin his escape with ease.

Lex shrugged. It wasn't like he intended to punish this man as well, and so long as he paid, Lex would have let him rest.

The carefully built environment of harmony in the tavern had been disrupted by the arrival of the two men. The news they shared wasn't what everyone had been hoping for.

There was a problem with the town formation, and there was no communication with the outside. It would take months before the light returned. By then, the number of monsters would be much greater, and some of them may even be nearing the peak of the foundation realm.

When it came to monsters, their strength grew quickly in the beginning but would eventually slow down. Most never surpassed the golden core realm, if they reached it at all. But their threat did not lie in their strength, but their numbers.

Lex wasn't too bothered by the news, because he more or less was expecting only bad news. So far, everything was still within the range where he could survive with just the tavern.

"I know some of you may be concerned about the duration," Lex addressed his guests. "But don't worry, whether it's months or years, the one thing the tavern will not be short of is supplies and food. You also don't need to worry about the lights turning off in here. The greatest challenge for you is to find something to entertain yourself with."

Lex's last sentence ended as a joke, and visibly relaxed everyone, but deep down, he meant it. Trapped in a building with nothing to do for a long time would slowly drive everyone insane.

At the same time, this experience gave Lex a new perspective on the Pro Bono function of the Inn. Across the many worlds, how many people would be in similar situations where they were completely trapped and needed aid? He understood that charity was not the purpose of the system, but suddenly he had a new appreciation for the feature. Maybe the system wasn't so bad. Maybe.

Two more days passed without anyone else arriving at the tavern. From the rooftop, Lex was able to see a few portions of the town where lights had appeared, which reassured him. He even shared the news with the guests.

This meant that at least some people had found some kind of solution, and there were other survivors in the town. Moreover, if someone had found a way to turn on the light formations in those few areas, there was a chance that soon they would be able to fix the town's formation. Unbeknownst to Lex, there areas had lights because the killer eased up the formation in those areas.

He allowed the strong warriors and soldiers in the town to lead survivors into those zones, so that all his targets would accumulate in a few areas. Currently, he was picking apart one of the newly created safe zones, killing one survivor every hour. Of course, he was doing it personally instead of using monsters or the formations. How else was he to enjoy it as much as possible?

While things had slowed down considerably at the tavern, back at the Inn, things were climaxing. The final 10 of the Lady Cosmos had been selected. At any given time, there were 13 million guests at the Inn to enjoy the show.

While not all of these guests were staying at the Inn, they would more or less still spend some MP. Still, even 1 MP at a time, Lex had managed to accumulate 7.8 billion MP more, bringing his total to 10 billion more or less.

Actually, it was 10,057,007,000 MP. Lex took the opportunity to create a request in the Guild room for pure energy crystals and put down a deposit of 57,007,000 MP. He would use this to test the waters and see if absorbing energy from within the Inn would help his energy accumulation. If it was... despite Lex's earlier plans, he might speed up his return.

After all, things were just too unpredictable at the tavern right now, and he did not want to spend months and possibly years trapped, unable to do anything.

But while he had a lot of free time, Lex was not free for he had to constantly manipulate the formation to kill monsters. This was not feasible as he would never have the time to sleep or rest.

As such he ended up spending 0.3% of his accumulated energy to add the Security room feature to the tavern as well. He temporarily made Rick incharge of security via the security room, and gave him control over the formation as well. This way, while Lex wasn't managing the security himself, Rick would do it.

With that done, he spent a good deal of time cultivating, and when he got tired he would watch the Lady Cosmos show.

Surprisingly, of the top 10, only 2 were actually humans! One was Hailey, the farmer from X-142 that Harry had grown fond of, and the other was Alissa, the YouTuber from Earth.

The favorite to win at the moment was a fair, followed closely by a slime. As surprising as it was for Lex to learn that slimes could be female, he was even more surprised to learn that this particular slime would manipulate its shape to form a very seductive humanoid figure. Moreover, it could manipulate the color of its slime to give itself the appearance of a woman in beautiful clothing. Its latest figure was that of an elf that it had seen at the Inn, which managed to steal a decent bit of the votes from Earth.

There was also a Fox beast from Nibiru which, after undergrowing an evolution in its bloodline due to the growth of the planet itself, could shapeshift into a human appearance.

The remaining five contestants were from a race Lex wasn't familiar with called Echos. They were not humanoid at all, but their cuteness level was astonishing! They were like cuddly teddy bears with eyes that could melt ice and a laugh that could fill one with glee.

The next stage of the competition would be an intense one, for it was not on stage or in a stadium. Instead, in the floating city above the village, the remaining girls would have to live for 5 days unaided. Moreover, lucky viewers, and some wealthy ones who paid for the opportunity, would be living in the city alongside them.

The final judgment would actually be influenced by votes of the viewers in the city, and the girls would have to convince them to gain their vote. This would be a live test of not only their charisma and social skills, but of their ingenuity and survival skills. This was because, other than a house to live in, the girls would not be provided with anything else.

Of course, during this portion, the girls would be provided with security to ensure something untoward did not happen. Moreover, it had to be ensured that the girls would not buy votes using some kind of shady deals or offers, and that only their ability to convince fans would be at play.

Lex was watching the slime have a jovial conversation with a group of ladies over coffee, regaling them with tales of its life, when Rick came to alert him of something.

From the rooftop, he has seen an entire group of people approach the tavern, slowly and steadily fighting against the hordes. In the lead of that group was Mario Ricci, the Goatfather.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 356: Disappeared

Lex was not at all surprised that Mario was unhurt. After all, he was much too strong for monsters of this level to overwhelm him. But when he reached his rooftop and saw the size of his party, he was extremely surprised.

It was much too small. Only around 10 people were following him. All of whom were excellent fighters on their own as well. Clearly they would have survived even without Mario as long as the rest were together. But their small numbers and, most of all, slow and steady speed told Lex something was going on

That's when Lex noticed that Mario's son, Elio, was not with the group. He did not jump to conclusions, but he kept the thought in mind.

Despite how near they were, the group did not get impatient at all, and continued on their pace. It took nearly an hour before they finally reached the tavern.

Like the previous two warriors, the group was hit hard by how contrasting the environment within the tavern was. But unlike the first group, they did not become overly arrogant once they reached this establishment filled with civilians. Thugs like them had a deeper understanding of the way of the world. In the killing field that Babylon had now become, only disgustingly overwhelming strength would allow one to live in such comfort.

Lex had prepared food for everyone already, and at the sight of the steaming bowls of soup being laid down for them, these rough and tumble men gave Lex a look filled with sheer appreciation and gratitude, and sat down to savor their first meal in days!

Mario, however, did not go towards the food and instead sat himself down at the bar, his deep set eyes gazing out into the distance. He ordered hard liquor with nothing but a gesture and downed the glass like a parched man chugging water.

"Your party is smaller than I would have expected," said Lex as he approached the man. Men like Mario did not need consolation or words to ease them. Instead, treating them softly or carefully might actually offend them.

In such a case, it was best to just be upfront with them about what you were curious about.

"It was that damn killer," Mario said, his voice hoarse. He downed another glass and began to pour one more drink for himself.

"He shepherded us like cattle towards the light, only to pick us off one by one. Even I couldn't catch him. He has clever ways to hide in the shadows, and of making people disappear, only for their corpses to reappear a short while later."

"Do you think he had something to do with the light formation failing?"

"He shouldn't. While he is very tricky and clever, he is not strong enough. The formation is heavily guarded. It would take at least a nascent cultivator to break through all of its defenses, and if he were that strong, he wouldn't be picking off the weak like that. He would be aiming for me. Instead, what he's been doing is not targeting me, but targeting people right in front of me. There's a small but significant difference."

Lex did not need to ask to know what the difference was. One meant that the killer was strong enough to challenge Mario, while the other meant the killer knew he couldn't take on Mario himself, but was skilled or crazy enough to antagonize him.

Lex asked him if he knew the situation in the rest of the city, which Mario did not. He had stuck close to his own turf until it became obvious that the killer would pick them off one by one unless they left.

One thing that caught Lex's curiosity was that the killer somehow had a way to not be targeted by the monsters in the dark. While everyone else was fighting for their lives, the killer was sailing through the darkness like a ship in calm waters.

Mario did not say much else, but the addition of new guests quickly caught everyone's attention. With not much else to do, they talked and exchanged stories, and quickly a new fear began to spread between those staying at the tavern - that Mario and his gang had led the killer right to them. But nothing of the sort happened. The tavern was as safe as always.

While Big Ben and Betty were just glad to be alive and safe, the triplets along with the bakers had many minor panic attacks. They all had family out in the dark, but they knew there was nothing they could do to search for them.

The small spark of stimulation provided with the addition of new guests soon waned as the days returned to their previous monotony. Lex had somehow produced more mattresses and bedding, and opened up the hidden chamber underneath the bar so the tavern wouldn't get even more crowded.

Seven more days passed like that and, just as everyone - the kids especially - were about to lose their minds, another group was spotted heading towards the tavern.

This group was much larger than Mario's, but when they arrived, they were also in much worse shape. This group had been led by one of the nobles and the parents of one of the 'extra staff' Lex had helping at the tavern.

Unsurprisingly, their story was very similar to Mario's. They were surviving, barely, in one of the safe zones that had developed around the town, until one day when the killer appeared and started killing them off one by one.

It was out of sheer desperation that they ventured out into the dark, but the giant beacon of light was not their first destination. It was like they had been forced by the killer to come this way, for when they head in any other direction, the murders would increase.

Lex received this news with surprising calm. It made sense. He had been feeling something was slowly building from the moment the lights failed.

Four days later, another man appeared. He walked through the darkness alone, the monsters dying around him. He was another noble, and he had been unable to save a single person. It was mostly the monsters that killed everyone he had tried to protect, and the few survivors had been picked off by the killer. The next day, the remaining three nobles arrived as well, once again alone.

By now the tavern building was jam-packed, even with the secret storage downstairs. The mood was grim. It seemed like they were the last survivors in the town, for no one knew what was happening with the mayor and town guards.

Even with nearly a 100 people packed into the tavern building, it felt like the loneliest place in the world. They lived on a small island of safety, surrounded by a hungry abyss.

At least, that was until Dino and Betty started getting creative with their foods, and started asking everyone what their favorite was. With the endless supply of ingredients that Rick somehow always provided them with, the mealtimes at the tavern became the most anticipated times of the day.

People would place bets, and play guessing games as to what would be the meals of the day. The music never stopped playing, and Lex provided an infinite variety of board game ideas for everyone to entertain themselves.

It really did feel like there was a festival going on inside. This was because one day Lex had an epiphany. If everyone's mood was being disrupted artificially by some means, could he not do the same?

He purchased a formation that blocked any outside interference in emotions, and another that slightly eased the mind.

That was all that was needed, for the numerous children inside immediately became joyful, and entertained all the guests. They created their own plays and put on their own performances.

Deep down, no one forgot that they were in a desperate situation. But at the same time, they could do nothing about it, so they chose to indulge in whatever joys they could claim.

Unbeknownst to them, for the last three days, the killer had been outside the tavern, hiding from the spotlight that lit up the street. He had been watching.

His plan to lure all the high value targets in one place was a success. What he did not expect, however, was that his system would fail to provide a safe way to infiltrate the tavern. So, for the last few days, he had been using his X-ray sight to carefully observe the tavern and its inhabitants.

There were too many peculiar things going on in there that could not be explained, so the killer didn't really try. His entire focus was on finding a way to infiltrate.

In the end, when he could not find a way on his own, he had to rely on one of the quest rewards he had been saving up to kill the mayor.

"System, prepare the Death Bubble. Target the highest value person in that building."

Suddenly, Lex, who was busy cultivating in his room, disappeared.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 357: Lucky

Lex was, as usual, cultivating in a tub of iced tea. Not only did the tea bath speed up his cultivation, it left his body smelling nice after he was done. In the past couple of weeks, his constant dedication had actually somewhat helped him make progress in the Foundation realm.

Today, however, while he was cultivating, he was hit with a sense of extreme danger! The danger was not external, but was a result of a disruption in his cultivation technique! Something had happened and before he could begin to comprehend it, there was an abrupt change in the amount of spirit energy his body was absorbing, causing the cultivation technique to immediately shut down.

Such a forceful interruption would normally be enough to completely rip away someone's meridians. Lex, however, managed to survive because of his incredibly sturdy body, as well as the fact that his meridians had been reforged out of metal. It still hurt like hell, though.

Though he managed to survive the disruption, his sense of danger did not disappear. Lex opened his eyes to find himself in a completely foreign place.

He was standing on a flat dirt road surrounded by the rubble of collapsed buildings. The sky was dark, as usual, but the familiar glint of starlight could be seen across the expanse. Lex was suddenly hit with a wave of nostalgia looking up at the heavens, but now was not the time to get lost in thought.

He turned around to his left and saw nothing more than rubble. Broken pieces of stone with rusted bits of metal sticking out of them sat in piles, undisturbed in this strange place for God knows how long. But it was not the rubble that Lex was looking at.

He was looking at the ground right before the rubble. No one was there, or at least, his eyes saw no one, but his gut was telling him otherwise. It told him there was a predator standing before him, and that he was in a situation he hadn't been in, in a long time. He was being hunted!

It was like when he was chased by zombies back on Vegus Minima, or the pack of wolves back on Nibiru. But there was one stark difference between now and then. It was that he was not afraid!

"How did I get here?" Lex asked, his voice calm and steady. Though he saw no one, his instincts had never been wrong before. Moreover, he had a pretty good idea of who he was about to meet. It was as if the gut feeling he had back when the lights failed was coming true.

His question was followed by silence for a few moments, but eventually he got a reply.

"This place is called Death Bubble. I can teleport anyone I target here, and then neither of us can leave until the other person dies."

A couple of moments later, a man appeared right where Lex was looking. He was pale and lanky, with short dark hair. His thin figure made him look malnourished, but his eyes were full of life. He grinned at Lex, revealing sharpened, yellow teeth.

"You're the first person to not panic at all when coming here," the murderer said in a gleeful voice.

"I'm used to teleporting," Lex replied plainly. Though he was standing still, it wasn't as if he was doing nothing. Lex's mind was running as fast as it could, and he was already making plans on how to kill the other.

"Good, good, you're strong. I've never killed a brave one before. This will be a new experience."

"Are you so sure that I'll be the one to die, and not you?"

"I'm very lucky. I wouldn't have met you if I couldn't kill you!" he answered excitedly, the saliva practically dripping from his lips.

Then the battle began.

The murderer stood still in front of Lex's eyes, but a figure appeared behind Lex silently and tried to stab his kidney.

Lex, who no longer only relied on his vision and sense of sound, was not taken by surprise and turned perfectly to avoid the dagger. At the same time, a small array of merely a few characters quickly formed in front of his left hand. Using the momentum from his turn Lex jabbed forward with his left hand aiming at the figure's neck, a small spear point blade of ice forming around his middle finger.

The figure, which was revealed to be the murderer, was surprised and could not react fast enough to avoid the jab. But, just as the small ice blade touched the murderer's neck something completely unexpected happened.

The rubble upon which Lexus was standing came loose, causing him to suddenly slip!

Lex lost his balance, causing his jab to miss and making him vulnerable once again to the killer.

A grin formed on the murderer's face as he realized what had happened and swung his dagger towards Lex. But while Lex could not dodge, he was not helpless.

Using his right hand, Lex used Talk to the hand, forming an invisible barrier which blocked the blade.

With his attack blocked, the murderer took a jump back to regroup and Lex quickly got up as well. Lex couldn't believe that he actually stumbled on some rumble, he normally wouldn't make a mistake like that.

The array he used earlier was one of the quickest and easiest arrays he memorized. It absorbed the moisture in the air to form a blade that was very sharp and sturdy. But because it was a very basic array, the blade did not have a proper grip, and would only sit on his finger when attacking directly straight.

If he tried a cutting or sweeping attack, the blade would fall off.

Still, the lethality of the blade should not be underestimated. Moreover, this was just one of the many arrays Lex memorized. Lastly, Lex had also gone a step beyond just memorization. He had formed a very simple system of his own to help him create new arrays on the fly. Since attacking with arrays was not hampered in any way by Regal Embrace, Lex's lethality had shot up.

Now, equipped with an arsenal of his own, Lex no longer waited for the murderer to attack again and took the initiative.

Two arrays began to quickly form, each in front of his hands. A ball of orange fire formed above his left hand and he used his right hand to aim at the murderer. Before the murderer could even react, the ball of fire went hurtling towards him at a speed too great to avoid.

This was the second time the murderer was taken by surprise, and didn't have time to react.

But, by sheer coincidence, a nearby ruin that had survived the untold number of years these ruins had existed broke, stimulated by the small vibrations of their fight. The wall fell down just perfectly to block the ball of fire before it reached the murderer, causing it to explode.

A cloud of dust exploded in the air, blocking Lex's sight and hiding the murderer behind its veil. When the dust cleared, the murderer had disappeared once more.

Lex could temporarily not locate him, most likely because he was no longer being blatantly targeted by the murderer.

He remained standing in place as he employed Ripple shell in case the murderer succeeded in landing a hidden blow, all the while trying to figure out what happened. Twice he nearly killed the murderer. He wouldn't be surprised if the murderer found some way to dodge or block the attack, but strange things kept happening to protect him.

Was this the murderers doing, or were they all coincidences? How was he supposed to overcome this?

A few ideas crossed Lex's mind and he began forming one of the larger arrays he knew. It would take a few seconds to ready, during which he would not be able to block so he needed to keep his wits about him.

His back tingled and he dodged to the side once again, just in time to see the murderer glaring at him, his earlier joy gone, slashing towards him with his knife.

"I will make your death slow," the murderer said between gritted teeth. He was genuinely afraid for his life for a moment. If his luck hadn't been so good, he would have died to that fire ball.

Angered by the retaliation, the murderer no longer cared about holding back, and used all the quest items his system had given him. It was lucky for him, they suited his attack pattern really well.

The murderer kept stabbing and swiping, showing a certain degree of amateurishness in his moves. But no matter how careless he seemed, he had too many kills under his belt for Lex to take him lightly, which is why he didn't dare take on his attacks directly.

Just as he was about to finish the array, he felt something stab him in the back. The sharp pain, that was far beyond anything it should have been, caused Lex to lose control of the array, causing a massive explosion.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 358: Like a King

More than the heat of the flame or the roar of thunder, it was the pressure of the explosion that rocked Lex. His body shot up into the air like a bullet, spinning and flipping like a gymnast giving his best performance.

It took a few seconds before the overwhelmed and dizzy Lex found a few moments of clarity, and a few seconds more before he was able to stabilize his body. In a heartbeat, he analyzed the damage to his body, and discovered, to his great surprise, that his back was completely unharmed. There was no stab wound, and the pain had completely disappeared, as if it was only his mind.

Other than that, though, he was not in his best state. The shockwave that passed through his body had rattled Lex to his bones, and though he was largely unhurt, the blatant flaw in his array plan hurt him more.

Deciding not to take any more chances, Lex decided to scrap every array he planned on using that would take more than 2 seconds to form. But before he could do anything to attack the murderer, he had to ensure he landed safely.

He formed quick and small arrays to immediately change his trajectory, in case the murderer had something planned for him where he would fall, and immediately slowed down his descent.

But changing the direction did not work, for the moment he landed on the floor, two stabbing pains shot up through his feet, as if he had landed straight into two pikes. Despite the experience from earlier, Lex couldn't help but look down to see that his feet were completely unharmed.

His back tingled, warning of an impending attack, but the pain in his feet and his knee-jerk reaction to investigate them wasted precious moments, making it so he couldn't retaliate like usual. Instead, he leaped forward and fell into a roll to get some distance.

But when he turned back, the murderer was not in sight.

Lex narrowed his eyes. As amateurish as he was in his attacks, the murderer wielded abilities that were genuine and quite lethal. By now Lex had understood that whenever he felt piercing pain, it was fake and served just as a distraction. But he dared not completely ignore the pain in case this was a feint, so that a real attack would follow when he learnt to expect nothing.

He had also somewhat gotten used to the murderer disappearing and consistently attacking from behind him. But even that he dared not get too comfortable with either.

But no matter what he did, Lex would not overcome him by waiting for him to attack first. He thought up a plan quickly and formed an array that caused fog to slowly accumulate at the knee level.

This way, he'd be able to determine as soon as the attacker attempted a single attack. He also formed another array, using the low level fog to hide a trap. But the effectiveness of the trap would depend on if the murderer continued to attack from the back, and the nature of the attack.

If he had managed to bring his thinking cap with him, he would have been able to use more complex and powerful traps, but alas life does not follow one's wishes.

His back tingled once again and, to hide the existence of the trap, Lex dodged normally and just as he turned around to look, his back tingled again.

This time the attack was too fast for him to dodge even with the warning, and something slammed into his back, throwing him onto the ground. The attack was not sharp and piercing, like he had been expecting from the knife. Instead, it was a large blunt force, as if he had been hit by a beanbag or something.

"You are nothing, idiot!" the murderer yelled, his voice filled with both anger and jubilation. "You are nothing. You are dead. All that remains is your final struggle."

Even disoriented, Lex was paying attention to his surroundings and the moment he located the direction the sound was coming from he fired off another fireball. But this time no accident happened to block the attack, and the murderer himself dodged it easily.

Yet when he turned to Lex to gloat, he was startled to find a flaming man walking his way. Lex had actually lit himself on fire!

This was not a diversionary tactic. Instead, Lex was acting off of his instincts. He felt that some kind of goo had latched onto his body where he had been hit earlier, and the goo was alive and trying to penetrate his skin! He felt actual, genuine danger for his life from the goo.

But the information provided by his instincts was jumbled and vague, he could only determine that the goo was alive, and that it would not come off his skin easily now that it had latched on.

So, taking advantage of his body's toughness, Lex lit himself on fire using an array.

But that was not all. More than pain, Lex felt a minor sense of humiliation at having to rely on having to light himself on fire. This feeling of humiliation came from a recent sense of pride that had planted itself in Lex as he overcame so many trials. Now this pride was fueling a flame much brighter than the one covering his body, and it sent Lex's mind into a state of overdrive.

It was similar to the sense of 'flow' that Lex used to get, but much greater, and with far fewer restrictions. Not only did his mind work faster to absorb all the information his various senses and instincts were providing him, he could almost split his mind into two. He could focus a majority of his attention on a certain task while leaving a portion of his thoughts to focus on a separate task without compromising the quality of work.

Moreover, the boost in his thought process was dozens of times greater than when he used the crown made by the crystal race, or even when he used to enter the state of flow before he entered the Foundation realm.

This boost would have been great if Lex had anticipated it. Since Lex did not anticipate it, and was caught in the state unaware, all his extra mental energy was focused on his anger at the murderer.

Lex used the technique he hadn't used a single time since he learnt it, Home Sweet Home, and, in a burst of speed, barely comprehensible, arrived before the murder in the blink of an eye and slammed his burning body right into him!

Burned and crushed, the murderer's body was flung away but Lex caught his ankle, keeping him from flying away!

With a furious bellowing roar Lex slammed his body into the ground and put his flaming foot on his chest. He aimed his array at the murderer's face and launched a flame ball at him.

But, just as the flame ball was about to hit him, the ground beneath him collapsed, revealing a sinkhole, moving his body out of the way.

Lex immediately absorbed a lot of information and quickly drew the conclusion that for nonlethal attacks, there would be no accidents, but as soon as he tried to kill the murderer, something would prevent it.

A few theories propped into his mind, but before he could try them out, the murderer let out an angry yelp as he dangled over the sinkhole and disappeared right from within his hand.

Lex squinted his eyes as he drew another conclusion. The murderer was not turning invisible but disappearing entirely, or teleporting somewhere else.

Lex formed two more arrays, entirely ignoring the fact that he was still on fire and the goo that had latched onto his shoulder had been completely burnt off by now.

The two arrays took him 2.4 seconds to form, even in his overdrive state. But, once they were completed a surge of spiritual energy started flowing around him, spinning in a circle.

His burning body acted like a flint, and lit up the energy into a fiery tornado that began expanding outwards, quickly burning everything it touched.

This attack would reveal the limitations of the murderers teleportation if there were any. Well, it could not entirely test the limitation of his ability, but Lex would eliminate them one by one.

In only a few moments the tornado had spread across half the visible land and continued to grow when, spontaneously and without warning, a burning meteor fell from the sky!

The meteor crashed into the ground some distance from Lex, causing a massive explosion that startled even Lex. He quickly deployed Talk to the Hand, using both his hands to block the aftermath of the clash between the fiery tornado and meteor!

Cracks formed in the invisible shield, but it ultimately held until the force of the explosion passed, leaving in its wake a site fit for armageddon. Only two small patches of land seemed unharmed - one behind Lex's shield, and another, conveniently blocked by a massive rock that jutted into the ground.

Behind that rock stood the murderer, panting and in pain. Though his ears were ringing, the murderer managed to hear a small sound. When he looked up to investigate he saw a flaming Lex, looking down at him from the top of the rock, like a King about to sentence one to death.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 359: Beatdown

Before the murderer could cry out or yell, Lex smashed his body into him using Home Sweet Home once again. The fire on Lex's body had gone out but the one in his heart was raging on as he continued to attack relentlessly.

Letting go of arrays, Lex used his bare fists to beat his body into submission. Since fatal attacks would trigger the coincidences, Lex aimed only to cripple him. Punch after punch landed on the murderer's skinny body, breaking it bit by bit. Compared to other body cultivators Lex's strength may not be as impressive, but to a person who was not a body cultivator, each of Lex's punches was like being smashed by a wrecking ball.

Unable to retaliate or even avoid, the murderer disappeared once again. But the ruins had been completely destroyed by the blast, eliminating all hiding spots. The moment Lex climbed up onto the big rock, he could easily see the collapsed body of the murderer in the distance. Not interested in giving him any time to retaliate, Lex dashed towards him once again.

But the murderer had been pushed to the brink of desperation by Lex's relentless assault, and he began mindlessly using anything and everything in his arsenal. A blue bubble appeared around his body just in time to stop Lex, causing him to crash head first into it.

Unable to stop in time, Lex's body hit the bubble hard, and fell back with a strong rebound. His nose broke and started bleeding.

Even in his state of anger, a part of himself could not stop himself from commenting on the irony that the greatest wounds he'd suffered so far were self-inflicted.

The murderer was not interested in Lex's self depreciation as he began to spend his Murder Points, or MP, to buy everything available to him. Mannequins started appearing out of thin air, all holding blades similar to the murderer, all looking at Lex with dark eyes.

When 109 such mannequins appeared, they attacked Lex in unison. Their coordination was immaculate, and it was as if a higher power was controlling each of their movements. Each of their attacks were smoother and deadlier than the murderers, though Lex could detect a hint of similarity in their attack patterns.

Still, none of it mattered. Something as simple and straightforward as physical attacks could not overwhelm Lex unless there was a massive difference in speed and strength, which there was not.

Guided by his instincts, Lex dodged so smoothly and seemingly effortlessly that were anyone to see it, it would seem that Lex and the mannequins were working together to purposefully avoid him. It was like he decided where he would move to dodge before they even decided to attack, and it was more or less exactly what was happening.

This was a result of a flaw due to how perfect their coordination was. That perfect coordination made it so that their next moves became predictable, even to the point where, in his overdrive state, Lex was able to determine what would happen four or five moves ahead.

Lex was moving as fast as he possibly could, but at the same time he was under no pressure. This allowed him to begin forming arrays to deal with the mannequins.

But the murderer was not done either, as he had killed enough people to accumulate quite a bit of MP.

A mannequin was hovering over him, healing his broken body while two, much more intimidating ones stood around him as guards. Moreover, armor filled with metal spikes slowly appeared around the murderer's body.

At a small distance, dirt from the ground was automatically piling up on itself, forming some kind of massive monster.

Up in the sky, the starlight was blocked by thunder clouds that were beginning to form.

All of this was taken in by Lex, even though he was busy dodging the mannequins. He did not know how the murderer was suddenly doing all these things but it was best to let him fully prepare.

His mind went through the various arrays he memorized, but none were suitable for the situation. He also didn't want to risk using Evisceration, as while he had increased his mastery over the technique, with the unusual coincidences happening, Lex didn't want to risk it. If the coincidence went from blocking the attack to somehow interrupting Lex's Evisceration, the result would be catastrophic.

He took a deep breath just as the arrays he was forming ended. The ground trembled and hundreds of sharp earthen spikes erupted from the ground, impaling most of the mannequins.

It was time to employ the rest of Lex's preparation with arrays. The conundrum of forming new arrays to match various situations was an extremely difficult one. If he had time it was not an issue, but in the heat of battle it was not possible.

So, Lex found a loophole using his knowledge of programming, and the unique connecting method employed in the Crystal realm for their arrays. It would somewhat diminish the power of the arrays, but it was good enough as it provided versatility.

Lex memorized over a hundred, extremely small arrays that performed very simple and basic tasks. He originally wanted to call them 'functions' but ended up just calling them letters. The reason for this was because the concept he was working towards was combining the various small arrays in the way letters combine to form words, and then words combine to form sentences.

Combining the so-called 'letters' was still not exactly straight forward, for even language has rules about how the alphabets behave let alone something as complex as arrays. Yet the concept of joining many small arrays to form one big array was too attractive to overlook, and much easier to design.

What he needed now was immense, concentrated fire power and so he began forming just such an array. At his current speed, within 1 second he could form up to 10 mini-arrays with the function of gathering heat. For the array he had planned he would need hundreds of such arrays, so he couldn't wait and began immediately.

A few seconds went by when the murderer realized that Lex was not attacking, as he usually did, and was instead preparing something.

"Attack!" he roared to his final two mannequins that acted as his bodyguards, as well as the arachnid shaped dirt monster. "Attack! Attack! ATTACK! KILL HIM FOR ME!"

A sharp, piercing pain stabbed him directly through the eyes and into his brain, but Lex did not even flinch in his overdrive state. Pain meant absolutely nothing to him right now.

The mannequins reached him in the blink of an eye, these ones armed with a sword and shield each. They were also much faster, and much stronger than the previous ones. Truly, they were formidable foes. Well, they were formidable if their opponent wasn't Lex.

With the forewarning from his instincts, Lex dodged each attack easily. In fact, Lex did not even look away from the murderer as he casually avoided each swing of the mannequin's sword.

The dirt monster, 12 feet (3.65 meters)tall, also arrived and started smashing at Lex with its numerous legs. It was not as fast as the other two, but it was much stronger. Dirt and rubble flew into the air under the explosion caused by its massive legs, yet Lex was as elusive as the wind.

A hint of fear crept into the murderer's mind as he observed Lex who never broke eye contact. But the fear was followed quickly by madness. He joined his hands together forming a strange symbol and began reciting some unusual prayer.

From the moment he uttered the first syllable, Lex felt the danger around him increase, and he knew he could waste no more time. Whatever he was doing had to be stopped! But his array was not ready either. It would take a few more seconds.

The duel suddenly turned into a lethal waiting game, and whoever struck first would gain the advantage. Normally Lex might have felt nervous under so much pressure, but his overdrive state allowed him maximum control of his every thought. Nervousness was not a useful emotion right now, so it would never be activated.

Of course, a part of his also had to do with the fact that Lex's mind had been flooded with pride and anger.

Just as 2 seconds were all that remained for Lex's array to be complete, he dodged his attackers and rushed towards the murderer. A monster that had previously not existed suddenly appeared in front of Lex, blocking him.

Unwilling to change his actions, Lex used Home Sweet Home and continued in a straight line. Either he would tear through the monster's body, or take him along with him.

But how could a monster formed from dirt be sturdy enough to block Lex.

Bursting right through the monster's chest, Lex appeared before the blue bubble that blocked the murderer and aimed his right palm at him. Even Lex was interested to see what kind of coincidence could block him now.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 360: Muderer System

Time seemed to freeze as the murderer looked at Lex's palm. He forgot that he was wearing special armor, and even forgot that he could do something to move. The sight of Lex bursting directly through the body of a monster to approach his bubble was eared into his brain.

Though the monster was made of dirt, when dirt was compacted enough it was not easy or simple to break through it. Then there was the look in his eyes. The disdain in his eyes was as clear as day, and the murderer was spellbound. He could look nowhere else.

They were eyes that told him that no amount of luck could deter him. No amount of help from his system was enough. No sword was fast enough or strong enough. They were eyes that told him death was nigh.

The murderer's mind collapsed, but there was not enough time to show it. A bright, yellow light shone out of Lex's palm. The next moment, a beam of yellow light with a 10 feet (3 meter) diameter was launched out of Lex's hand.

It was silent. There was no loud bang, no sonic booms. Moreover, there was no sound of a collision, or something crashing. One moment all was well, and the next a massive yellow beam seemed to appear, and traveled to infinity.

From afar, it actually looked pleasant. Nearby, however, anyone would be too distracted by the searing, immolating heat the beam gave off.

When the light disappeared, everything that had been in its path disappeared. Even the ground disappeared perfectly in the shape of the circular beam of light where the light touched it, its cooked edges slowly giving off smoke.

The attack had been the most devastating that Lex had ever released, clearing almost everything in its path. Almost because a single figure fell to the ground when the light disappeared. The armor the murderer had been wearing had melted into a puddle and had been blown away, yet the murderer had survived because of a protective amulet he had been wearing on his person.

The amulet, through some unusual coincidence, had been specifically made to protect from heat based attacks, and had been used up entirely to protect the murderer.

Lex was not disappointed to see the murderer survive. He felt nothing. No matter how many times he avoided death, all Lex had to do was try again. Wasting no time, Lex arrived in front of the murderer and lifted him by the throat.

The murderer was unresponsive, for his mind had collapsed due to fear. Lex ripped off his shirt and removed any and all jewelry or talismans he wore to further reduce his chances of survival. It was much easier now that the murderer was simply limp.

Once he was sure the murderer had nothing else on his body, Lex punched his face, completely determined to kill him with that hit.

A bolt of lightning fell from the sky, landing directly on Lex's crown, paralyzing him and preventing him from completing his punch. Oddly enough, the lightning did not affect the murderer. When Lex recovered he tried again, but the unusual land they were in experienced an Earthquake, causing Lex to stumble.

He tried again and cramped in the foot. He tried again and a massive gale started, pushing Lex to the ground. He tried again and darkness fell, causing him to miss. He tried again, his expression constant throughout.

He was Lex freaking Williams, and even an act of God, or several acts, would save the murderer from him after crossing him.

Serene Williams, mother of Lex Williams, trembled as she looked at the person who arrived on the planet. It was her eldest daughter, Belle. Her face was as expressionless and cold as ever, and only the fierce determination in her eyes set her apart from an emotionless doll.

The silence echoed through the hall as the two marinated in the tumultuous emotions that filled this moment.

Finally, unable to control herself, Serene opened her mouth to speak, but Belle beat her to it.

"I've officially graduated from Ventura Gold, but I have no intentions of continuing onto Ventura itself."

After trying to speak and failing multiple times, all Serene could say was, "how?"

"How could I not? I had the love and affection of my parents supporting me. All that was left was to break through my limits time and time again, use all the resources available to me and steal the ones that weren't, and force myself into the Immortal realm."

Even as she said this, and hinted at the grave dangers she faced all without informing her family, her expression remained impassive as ever.

"And you're leaving Ventura to go back to... them?"

"It is my duty and my place. I do not need the honor given to me as a birthright. I will take it on my own."

"You... you do not know the full story. They will kill your brother if they ever meet him. They are not the angels that they claim."

"Even better then, that I become sovereign of the William family then, isn't it? I can then protect my baby brother with my own hands."

"You do not understand..."

"Enough!" said Belle firmly. "I am not here for this. I only came to let you know that I have become Immortal, and to ask you a question. Will you continue to create a cultivation technique tailored to me, or shall I go to the family and take a complete one on my own?"

There was a painful moment of silence before Serene's eyes also became determined. Belle was always like this, from the time she was a baby. If she could not prevent her from taking this path, all she could do was help her.

"I'll continue to create a technique for you," she said, her voice regaining the command normally embedded in a parent's voice. "But since you are determined to take your own path, do not blame others for doing so as well. If you change your name to Evangeline, then your father's sword will be drawn before its time - you know how he is about these things. Now come, explain your breakthrough to me thoroughly. We need to establish what tenants your future cultivation will be based on. No child of mine will ever cultivate a subpar technique, it needs to be perfect."

Despite her usual impassiveness, Belle could not help her lip twitching at her mother's comments. Only she, Serene Williams, could call the cultivation technique provided at the Ventura academy and Williams family subpar. After all, as far as humans were concerned, no one could form a better cultivation technique than her. Even her own father gave up his entire cultivation to start again under her guidance. Although his cultivation realm was now much lower than what it once was, no one dared to test his sword. No one.

A beaten and battered Lex punched the murderer once again. It was ridiculous that the murderer himself had not been able to hurt Lex, yet the unusual coincidences had him drenched in his own blood.

But even then, it was just to the extent of spilling a little blood. Whether it was earthquakes, tornados, lightning strikes, meteors, collapsing buildings, sudden cramps, loss of control of spiritual energy and even a minor heart attack, Lex remained undeterred.

He was genuinely amazed that even his body was susceptible to these coincidences. He really wanted to understand what was the cause, but he wanted to kill the murderer even more.

Moreover, while the attacks his body suffered were lethal for normal people, to him they were naught but minor inconveniences. He could live for hours and hours even if his heart completely stopped beating, so a small heart attack was nothing. Due to the resilience of his meridians, the loss of control of spiritual energy was even less dangerous.

Of course, if the coincidences became too dangerous, he would stop. For now though, they were within an acceptable range.

But, the next moment, though he was not expecting it, nothing stopped his fist from connecting to the murderer's face. His end was quite abrupt and gruesome. Lex suddenly left the overdrive state and was hit by the urge to wipe his hand. Not to be graphic, but not much remained of the murderer's face at all, simply because Lex had used too much strength. Much of it had been blown away, but some of it was still stuck to Lex's hand.

He did not know when or how he would return, as apparently he would be sent back after one of them died, but then something unexpected happened.

He heard the familiar sound of a notification from his system.

System Notification:

New system detected! Analyzing the secondary system. Murder system grade D+ detected. Host can choose to assimilate with the secondary system and have two concurrent systems, or absorb it to strengthen the existing system. Please note: this decision will be fixed and final, and will result in the same action for all subsequent systems discovered.