

Innkeeper 371

The Innkeeper

Chapter 371: Merciless onslaught

"What is that supposed to mean?" Lex asked. A system's greatest weakness was another system. So was his system supposed to help him out in looking for other system users?

"That is all I can say," Mary said, shaking her head.

Lex mused on everything he had learned today, and thought about things he needed to do in the future. One very important thing to take note of was that if he was outside the Inn or tavern, the prescience of a treasure within his soul might become perceivable. While the system could hide itself, as it had once done when he encountered Loretta's dad, Lex needed to take a more active role in its protection. If he was on the lookout for more systems, there would be others as well.

He didn't want to spend too much time thinking about these things, for he hadn't forgotten that he had guests waiting for him.

"What's the update on the Inn?" Lex finally asked. "Did I miss anything important?"

"Many things," Mary replied in an exhausted tone. "The Lady Cosmos is nearing its end. Only two contenders remain, but a few days ago an incredibly strong cultivator arrived claiming that one of them was her slave and that we should return her immediately. The dragon managed to subdue him, and the security team managed to kick him out of the Inn, but now the contestant is too afraid to go on. She is very concerned that, once the competition ends, and she returns to her planet, someone will show up to turn her into a slave."

Lex narrowed his eyes. He truly had no solution for what someone might do outside of the Inn.

"Tell me about her," Lex said.

"Her name is Jill. She is a Fox from Nibiru that underwent an evolution and became able to convert into a human. She claims that she has lived her whole life on Nibiru and has always been free. The person

who claims to be her owner is from a species known as Galati, and was very strong. Even Qawain was unable to deal with him, and only the dragon's assistance resolved the situation."

"Well, what's the issue, then? If he's not her master, then there's no way he'll be able to locate her or her planet. I believe everyone was very carefully informed not to share personal information during the show."

"She did not reveal anything, but someone from Nibiru recognized her and spread her information. Although the person hunting her may never be able to find her planet, she is extremely afraid of returning - he was just that strong. She's been completely crippled with fear. Even if that Galati can't find her, she's too afraid of being found by others."

Lex nodded and said, "I'll create a new room called the Hot tub room. Send her there to relax and relieve the stress on her mind first. Afterwards, send her to Harry and have him help her out in removing the excess fear that has taken hold of her mind. In the meantime, we'll think of solutions. In fact, send me her details. If she's skilled and has a good personality, we can hire her as a staff member and then she can live here. That'll solve her problem."

Mary nodded and said, "Since you've brought up Harry, there's also a matter concerning him. He's been asking me to find out... if he gets married, can his wife live at the Inn with him as well?"

Lex was genuinely startled by the question. Harry was 17 years old, or maybe he was 18 now. Either way, he was extremely young. Why was he thinking of getting married?

Not waiting for Lex to ask, Mary explained how Harry and quickly developed a relationship with one of the contestants for Lady Cosmos. Though she did not win, she had made it to the top 5.

Once the competition was over for her, she and Harry had spent so much time together and had developed feelings quickly. As abrupt as it seemed, both wanted nothing more than to get married at once, hence the question.

After all, without the Inn, they both lived on different planets and would not be able to have a life together.

Lex, of course, knew a bit about what was going on between Harry and Hailey, but this was a little too much. Still, he was happy for them, and allowed them to live at the Inn together once they got married. After all, Harry already had a room at the Inn.

Next were a few other miscellaneous problems, including the children's area Lex requested. At the time, he had allocated a massive empty plot of land at the Inn and wanted to turn it into some kind of childcare/ festival type area, where parents or guardians could temporarily drop off their kids.

The design was ready and, after getting Lex's approval, he spent 2 million MP to make it happen. It wasn't too elaborate since it was targeted towards kids. It was mostly just colorful and full of play areas that were child friendly.

While Lex was receiving a report of the Inn's situation, at the Inn, near the area where the kids' area was designed, two kids were riding Peacocks across the lawn.

The peacocks, which had lived at the Inn for nearly a year, had naturally been nurtured by the turtle and had grown powerful enough to support the weight of fully grown men, let alone two children.

"Princess Layla, new territory straight ahead," said the boy, looking through a pocket telescope at the new structure that was plainly visible to the naked eye.

"Well then, deputy commander Captain Jimmy, full speed ahead! Peacock warriors, we will conquer all these lands!"

As if to answer her declaration, a few other children riding peacocks appeared on the horizon. The battle for the playground was nigh, but would the staff of the Midnight Inn be able to handle the merciless onslaught that awaited them?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 372: Time to hunt

The Midnight Inn day care service, which had existed for an entire 3 minutes 21 seconds, fell under the siege of the Peacock warriors. Astride their viscous mounts, they leaped over the padded, childproof boundary walls and right into the children's zone.

Some landed in the hedge maze, filled with ripe, delicious fruit ready to be plucked and eaten. Others who leaped over the walls landed in the ball pool, or rather, in the sea of colorful plastic balls. Others still landed in houses made entirely of trampoline like surfaces, while some landed on the jungle gym that stood above a massive pool. Delicious candy was stashed like treasure in the center of the jungle for all to see, but the path to it was perilous.

"Princess Layla, the enemy has laid booby-traps," Jimmy said, his eyes affixed on the jiggiest plate of jelly ever known to man, hidden in the center of a mirror maze.

"The Peacock warriors know no fear," she replied gallantly. "Forward march! The lands shall know our might!"

But before the march could even begin, the rabbits from Bunny nation appeared one by one, confused. They had been hired as caretakers at the daycare, but no one had come to drop off any children, so where had these little ones popped out from?

Unfortunately, no one would answer them.

The bunnies barely had any training on how to deal with kids, so they began hopping around trying to calm them down. Unfortunately, they only made themselves easy targets for the Peacock warriors.

Like this, the first of the great Peacock-Bunny skirmishes began.

Lex, woefully unaware of the plight of his workers, dismissed Mary and finally returned to the main hall of the tavern. Having regained control of the system, not to mention having attained great upgrades and benefits, Lex's mood was noticeably better when he returned to the Noel family.

The man on the bar was still crying with his head covered by a towel that Rick threw his way. Bertram and the other man were also sitting at the bar, casually sipping on a hot beverage as they waited for Lex to return.

Although the town needed their help and supervision, there was no longer any emergency so they could take their time. After all, all monsters were dead and the people who were trapped underground were only trapped and not harmed - probably.

Even if they were, understanding the truth behind not only the tavern, but possibly even that mysterious aura from earlier took precedence. After all, it would be too much of a coincidence for a tavern capable of surviving Zagan's attacks to appear at the same time as an unknown, powerful entity they had never discovered in the region before.

Even if it was not hostile towards them, they could not simply ignore it. After all, this was their territory, and they had plenty of secrets to hide. Even if they had no conflict now didn't mean there wouldn't be a conflict in the future if their secrets were revealed.

"Please excuse my behavior from earlier. There was a matter that required my attention," said Lex as he walked up to Bertram.

"Considering all that's happened here recently, it's completely understandable if there are a few fires to put out here and there," Bertram replied. "Allow me to introduce you. This is my father, Joseph Noel - lord of this territory."

"It's an honor to meet you," Lex said politely, though he only gave a slight nod instead of an elaborate bow as one might do before such an important person. It was already too late for him to start pretending to be ordinary, so there was no point in him being too deferential now.

"Your establishment provides surprisingly good service," Joseph said, as he raised his mug a bit. "I'm surprised you opened up in such a small town rather than one of the big cities."

"Small towns have their own rustic charm," Lex replied. "Besides, I was not really in the mood for too much hustle and bustle. A simple tavern in a simple town is enough for me."

"A simple tavern?" Joseph repeated with an amused tone.

"Indeed, in a simple town," Lex replied, looking the man in the eye. "By the way, I have something for you."

From his pocket, Lex took out a stack of papers and presented it to the man.

"Not to be rude or anything, but I'm assuming as the lord of the territory, you'll take care of the lodging and food expenses for all the survivors during this period."

The papers were an itemized bill for all the services he had provided during this time to all the people who had crammed themselves at the tavern. At first, in the name of humanity, Lex decided not to charge them since it was an emergency situation. But since the 'lord of the territory' was here, there wasn't any reason for him to continue to bear the cost. After all, he was running a business, not a charity.

Joseph struggled to keep his face straight as he received the bill and handed it to his son without even looking at it.

"Of course we'll take care of it," Joseph answered. "Though speaking of taking care of survivors during an emergency, it's quite impressive that your tavern was able to survive Zagan's destruction."

It was time. Lex had to give some kind of answer, no matter how vague.

"Very fortunate, I think," said Lex. "It was due to a protective formation left behind by a friend of mine who was very concerned for my health."

"God bless such friends," Joseph replied, though it was unknown whether he believed the story.

"Is your friend still around? With skill like his, even I wouldn't mind paying for his services to build a formation or two. After all, danger is around every corner in these parts. Even Zagan, the ocean King, himself was scared away by the aura of another powerful being nearby. Even I was startled by it, yet I noticed none of the survivors who escaped your tavern even felt the aura. Such protection truly is remarkable."

"My friend already left a while ago, though I'll thank you on his behalf for complimenting his skill. I'm not sure what aura you're talking about, since I didn't feel it either, but maybe you should check underground. There have been a number of strange auras coming from underground lately."

The words spoken were all polite, but the subtle testing and probing by the lord were all deflected by Lex. When Joseph hinted that Lex might know or have something to do with the aura that scared away Zagan, or that it might even belong to his mysterious 'friend', Lex replied by letting him know that he had no intentions of revealing anything, and that if questions needed to be asked, there were a few he could ask himself about what was happening under the town.

After all, even the Lotus on his back had been attracted to the aura that had been revealed earlier. Whatever was hidden down there was truly something unimaginably precious. Maybe, just maybe, the whole reason the town was formed here in the first place was to use a protection formation as a guise for a much more elaborate formation, the true purpose of which was to hide the treasures underneath.

There was a moment of silence after which Joseph was about to reply to Lex when the weeping man beside them quickly got up.

He removed the towel over his head and looked at Lex with eyes filled with red streaks!

"I want more!" he said hoarsely. It had been a long time since he had been as splendidly drunk as what he had just experienced. Unfortunately, the effects of the drink, while splendid, did not last a long time. With his cultivation level, he could barely remain drunk for an hour.

As an addict, he was naturally desperate to drink it again. Yet Lex did not forget his latest quest. He had to help the man overcome his alcoholism, and he had to do it in 3 days.

This would not be easy, but Lex would definitely try. In fact, he already had 2 plans in mind on how to tackle the problem.

The first was a complex plan that hinged on the man's own willingness to cooperate. The second was to turn him from an alcoholic into a druggie. It was not the most moral solution, but with only 3 days, he had to be a little creative.

"I'm sorry, but I only have one more serving of the drink left, and the price of the drink has changed."

"It doesn't matter. No matter what the price is, I can pay it."

"It's not a matter of money," said Lex as he said goodbye to the 500,000 MP he would get from selling it. "You have to do a few things for me. Let's start with this."

Lex let out a low whistle, summoning Fenrir from the kitchen wagging its tail.

"Take him out of the town and help him hunt the monsters for a bit. He's never had such an opportunity, so it's the best time to practice. Of course, you can't let it get hurt."

Honestly, since Fenrir's original role was supposed to be a protector of the Inn, it was about time it started training a little on how to hunt.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 373: Impressive pup

Bertram, Joseph and the drunk all looked at Fenrir with curiosity. Although only a very short time had passed since they arrived. Bertram and Joseph at least had gotten a full debriefing of everything that happened during this period and had paid special attention to everything relating to the tavern.

There had been no mention of a pet dog whatsoever, and in a building as cramped as this had been, it was impossible to hide such an animal. After all, even if the animal itself was hidden, any sound it made would still be heard by the various guests.

The drunk, instead, looked at Fenrir like a man parched in the desert, finding a glass of water before him.

By instinct, without even realizing that it would be inappropriate, all three immortals scanned the dog with their spiritual senses. It had been a split second only before they snapped out of it, and recalled that Lex may find the gesture rude. Yet that split second was more than enough to give them an overwhelming amount of information.

First of all, even under the pressure of three immortals, Fenrir did not flinch. He continued to wag his tail and stroll towards Lex. He had entered a whole new world full of new energies and new smells and, best of all, no scary turtle to give it baths. He was incredibly happy. The fact that he had returned to Lex also greatly improved its mood.

Just his amazing resilience to their aura was enough to alarm them, but then what their scan revealed was even more amazing. A simple scan was not enough to reveal to them the secrets of Fenrir's bloodline, but it was enough to let them know that Fenrir was of an astounding pedigree.

So much so that Joseph and Bertram came to a tacit understanding that the beast that had revealed its aura earlier had been related to this dog here in some way. Now they were certain that Lex himself was a powerful person, hiding his identity for some reason, and had an even stronger entity hiding in the tavern.

They did not do something as immature or juvenile as blaming or judging Lex, despite his immense strength, for not helping out the town instead of sticking to his tavern. The strong did not need to give an explanation for what they did, and it was not their responsibility to begin with.

In fact, saving as many as he did, and even going so far as only charging Joseph something as paltry as money for his service, already spoke of Lex's immense magnanimity.

All these thoughts went through the immortal's heads in merely the first second of Fenrir's arrival, and though Lex noticed something, he did not comment on it.

"Of course, if you remove all danger, then it won't count as proper training," continued Lex. "Let him battle on his own, but if the situation gets too dangerous, you can help him out. A few scrapes here and there won't be a big deal either."

"Understood," said the drunk as he accepted the task.

Lex was not worried that he would end up not doing his task properly and let Fenrir get hurt. First of all, Lex had seen how he fought Zagan. Despite his drunken appearance, the man was a legitimate powerhouse. Secondly, with his connection to Fenrir, he would always know if Fenrir got hurt, and could summon him right back to himself in case of an emergency.

Still, as a precaution, Lex scanned the drunken man.

Name: Aegis Cornellius

Age: 88

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Earth Immortal

Species: Human

Condition:

Drunk

Remarks: A child that never grew up.

Lex raised an eyebrow out of curiosity. He had dealt with Cwenhild enough so that he was no longer intimidated by the thought of someone from the royal family. But an immortal who also happened to be from the royal family, tracking him down specifically with the plastic fork in his hand. This required a bit more caution.

But it mattered not. Not only did Lex have ways of protecting himself, Aegis seemed to have forgotten whatever his task was. The remark, alongside his reaction from when he had his drink, gave Lex some ideas on how to proceed with helping him overcome his drinking addiction.

Once Lex told Fenrir that Aegis would take him hunting, he became extremely excited and began jumping up and down with excitement. Aegis too wasted no time and quickly took Fenrir alongside him outside the town formation.

The darkness did not intimidate the dog, and the various monsters that suddenly turned their attention towards them seemed only like play things. Fenrir looked at them with his head turned out of curiosity. He was supposed to hunt these things? He felt no threat from them though.

Whatever, he would treat it as a game. He bared his teeth and leaped into the closing horde. Weak as they were compared to Fenrir's own strength, the pups total lack of combat experience immediately began to show. Fenrir did not give up though, as the pain from the various attacks unlocked a memory it had suppressed.

It recalled the pain it had been feeling from even before it was born. It remembered its flesh being torn open and stitched back again and again, helpless and unable to even understand. Most of all, it remembered a vague memory of another pup... of a sibling, maybe.

Slowly the anger that had been buried deep within its bones, but had turned cold due to a simple and easy life, began to rekindle. Slowly, his viciousness began to return. Slowly, Fenrir began to step onto the path destined for it.

Back at the tavern, Lex turned to Joseph. Before they were interrupted, they had been probing each other silently and secretly. Now, though, before they could return to such a state, Lex took control of the situation and diverted the conversation.

"I'm sure you have much on your plate right now, with all that has happened, but if you get some free time, there are some things I could use your help with. Of course, I would not take your help for free, and will see how I can repay you. Maybe I can even ask my 'friend' to help out with some matters, though at most he will help get some precious materials instead of directly helping out."

Bertram and Joseph both turned towards Lex, interested in what he had to say. Pvarti, who had been drinking on his own all this time, had fallen asleep at the bar and was lightly snoring. Though Lex still did not know the details of what had happened to their family, he assumed that his presence was not required for such important conversations. After all, his personality seemed more inline with partying than actually working.

"I'm in need of energy, massive stores of energy. Something like spirit stones won't cut it. I've seen crystals before, completely clear crystals that contain extremely pure and dense energy that are used by the Crystal race for cultivation. If you can get your hands on those, I'll try my best to satisfy your requirements as well."

"How many do you need?" Bertram asked, his voice steady, not revealing what he was thinking.

"Not many, about a hundred would do."

"A hundred!"

Bertram and Joseph were both startled. Unbeknownst to Lex, they actually had a mine from which they extracted such crystals, but even so, producing 100 of them was a monumental task.

"A hundred is impossible, but I'll see what I can do. The question is, how will you pay for them?"

"Providing you with a formation like mine is impossible," Lex said flat out. "But I can procure other precious materials for you. I'm not sure what will be available, but you can provide a list of things you need and I'll see what I can get."

The father and son exchanged a glance and no doubt had a mental conversation, discussing the details of their trade.

The truth was, Lex wasn't really in need of energy. Asking for the crystals was only the first step in helping them become more comfortable trading with Lex. This was because the rare items he said he could procure would come from various requests in the guild room. Since he could ask for rare materials, he could skip the middleman and directly ask for concentrated energy stores.

In fact, he had already put up various requests in the guild room for energy stores or batteries or whatever. Since he had Inter-realm broadcast now, he'd be able to summon items from the Inn which had, essentially, resolved his energy crisis. It was only a matter of time now.

What Lex was truly after now was secrets only strong natives would know. He wanted to know the history of Kraven. Although the elder from the Crystal realm he met hinted at the fact that he could find out from him, Lex did not want to place all his chips on a single horse.

Once the Noel family began to trust him a bit, he could begin his investigation.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 374: Making a plan

"SAVE ME!" roared a bunny, but it was of no avail. It was each rabbit for itself right now. Deputy commander Captain Jimmy was having trouble holding onto the rabbit he had begun to ride, but he was, after all, not ordinary. He had built up the Peacock warriors side by side with Princess Layla and had conquered many beasts.

Only the ever elusive flying whale had remained safe from him - not even the miniboss of the Inn, the giant turtle, had been able to avoid being his mount. Though to be fair the turtle never tried to resist to begin with. Still, Jimmy was a relentless child. He had affixed himself onto the large rabbits back by clamping his thighs shut, and he was holding onto its ears like a harness. It could jump around as much as it wanted, but he would never let go.

Or so he thought.

"Jimmy, it's time to go," called his mother who casually walked through the chaos of the child zone, informally now known as no-man's land. When all the children in all the Inn, human, beast or otherwise, all gathered together in one area there was bound to be chaos.

In fact, egged on by the antics of their counterparts, a few gangs had already formed in the No-man to compete against the Peacock warriors.

Furthermore, whoever was running the child care area was extremely sharp minded. Instead of dispersing the gangs, they organized small friendly games to build competition between the gangs. They went from hide and seek, tag, puzzle solving, cooking, crafting and more. Each competition would net the winning team some points, and at the end of each week the winning team would have their name put up on a recognition board and win small prizes in a ceremony.

Moreover, the competitions were short and were formatted in such a way that the entire gang did not need to participate all the time. Whenever someone from Peacock warriors was available, they could take part in any competitions going on at the time.

"Just a minute mom!" Jimmy yelled back as he maintained his tight grip on the rabbit's body. A few seconds of crazed hoping later, an alarm ran announcing the end of the competition, allowing Jimmy to finally relax his grip.

The rabbit and the boy both fell to the ground in exhaustion, but the difference was that while the rabbit was mourning the fuzzing of its fur, Jimmy had a wide grin. He had yet to lose a single competition.

"Jimmy lets go," said his mother once again, picking the boy up from the ground. "You have to complete your homework before your bedtime. Mrs. Evilteacher has been complaining about your work lately."

"No mom, noooooooooo," he wailed, his good mood ruined. But alas, it was to no avail as his mother took his hand before both of them disappeared.

In the distance stood Rafael, who had been watching the entire competition. His eyes were filled with strange emotions. In his past life, he had known Jimmy as a silent but hard man. He was a warrior like no other, and though he was not strong, he had distinguished himself from the rest due to his sheer grit.

Watching him now, like this, enjoying games with friends and going to school like an ordinary kid, Rafael could not imagine this was the same person. He did not know what had happened in his life to turn him from this normal, happy child to such a dark and grim person. Whatever it was, Rafael swore he would not let it happen again. Jimmy had not been the closest friend he had in the future, and his achievements on the larger scale of things were unremarkable.

Still, whatever he had was worth protecting. After all, there would be no point in his return to the past, or maybe his visions of the future, if he didn't change the future. Even if it was a small change that would only affect or protect one child, he would do it. This was merely his beginning. In the future, he would change everything.

Joseph and Bertram were left feeling slightly awkward. Lex had asked for extremely precious resources, but in exchange, had offered vague payments. Saying stuff like he could procure 'precious or rare' materials or treasures sounded more like a scam than anything else. Plus, whatever it would be would have to be equal in value, and then something they actually needed. After all, there was no point in gathering something valuable, but completely useless.

Fortunately, Lex was not asking for delivery first and instead requested that they submit a list of items for him to locate first. If he insisted that they provide the crystals first, they would start to think that he was trying to blackmail them.

Regardless, since Lex had requested that they provide him a list of items, Joseph quickly prepared one. The Noel family's speciality, publicly, was their treasure manufacturing. For certain items their production was halted or slowed due to the absence of some rare materials. It was not a matter of the Noel family being unable to pay for them, but rather of the items not being available in the market all the time.

The list he gave Lex only had items that were either not available on the market frequently, or were so rare it would take decades for it to appear at all.

Lex perused the list casually before putting it away. He would put down these items and their descriptions in the Guild room. Hopefully, he would get a response quickly.

With their initial business concluded, the Noel family left to go oversee and help with the citizen rescue.

Lex was left nearly alone in the tavern, with only Rick, Roan, the sleeping Pvarti and the children that had been put to sleep to keep him company. All others had gone in search of their friends or relatives.

He knew for a fact that most of them were about to be met with disappointment. Even if they had survived the darkness, the killer and the monsters, the destruction of Zagan's battle was thorough. Unless one was hiding underground, Lex did not think they would have any hope of surviving. And even then, it was only a hope and not a certainty.

But, of all of them, he hoped that at least the triplets and Dino's families were alright. Only time would tell now.

With that done, Lex retreated to the meditation room and put on his thinking cap. With everything that had been happening the past few days, Lex hadn't had time to properly reflect on all that had happened.

By nature, Lex liked to have a plan to follow, and liked to think things out. It was not necessary to follow the plan to the letter, but at least the plan gave him direction. If he started from the beginning of recent

events, the first was that he had been pulled into the killer's Death Bubble without any forewarning whatsoever.

It was the first time his instincts had failed him entirely. He always knew that his instincts couldn't be entirely perfect, but he always assumed that it would be someone with a much higher cultivation level than him that would beat him. Instead, it was someone with a system.

That revealed to him that, most likely, in all things related to systems, his instincts would likely not work. This theory needed further testing, but it made sense. The systems were something beyond common understanding after all.

The next matter was that he was teleported out completely without any protection. Even though the tavern wasn't exactly as secure and in sync with the system as the Inn, he had safety measures in place but he was still at the mercy of the system.

According to Mary, only a system was another system's weakness, so if he wanted to be protected all the time, he should never leave the Inn - although he wasn't so sure he wanted to do that either.

The next point of concern was that his new battle style using arrays was more or less a success. What he needed to do now was increase his implementation speed and thinking speed. Implementation could be sped up with practice, but increasing his thinking speed would likely require him to train in some kind of mental technique.

That led to his next issue. He needed a reliable source of cultivation techniques. He could, theoretically, return to the Hum nation and go back to the academy and search for techniques there, but he'd rather not risk it. He didn't know what danger had driven him away from there and he was in no mood to find out.

He had John who could design techniques, but how long would that be a viable solution? He needed a new venue for techniques.

The next issue was that he needed to up his practice with Evisceration. If he had completely mastered the technique, even Lex was curious to see what kind of coincidence could have saved the killer from him.

With these few, relatively simple points addressed, he now had to think about systems, and system users.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 375: Don't kill

It was a matter of fact that, from now on, no matter who he met, a part of him would always wonder if the other person was a system user. But excessive suspicion was not only really bad for him, it would actually distract him from locating actual system users since his attention would be spread so thin.

What he needed to do was, keeping in mind everything he knew about systems, maintain a vigilant state for clues. Only if a person behaves oddly or did something out of the ordinary would he consider analyzing the likelihood of them having a system. Maybe this way he would miss out on actual system users, but the fact of the matter was that he had other objectives than just looking for system users, and if he didn't ration his mental capacity, he would fail in all his tasks.

Moreover, once he did identify someone he suspected had a system, his surveillance had to be as discreet as possible. In fact, it would be best if he could spy on them at the Inn. He did not enjoy undertaking unknown risks.

As for what he would do once he was sure someone had a system... that was a decision that would have to wait till the actual situation occurred.

Another thing he had to do was go through the list of people he actually knew, or guests from the Inn, and gauge whether or not they likely had a system.

From his actual personal life, he directly dismissed everyone he knew. There was no point in even considering he had lived too ordinary a life before the Inn to even suspect anything mildly supernatural, let alone someone having a system. Then came his various guests.

In lieu of their insane cultivation levels, Lex wanted to suspect Bastet and Falak but then dismissed the idea. Though they were strong, they did not do anything unusual enough to warrant suspicion.

Next he thought of Marlo. To be honest, just based on how crazy his life had been, Lex wanted to believe he had a system. But if he did, he would not have lived with an injury for so long, nor would he have ignored his son's plight.

Next was Alexander Morrison, but he was just rich and privileged, not crazy supernatural life system users.

Then he thought of Ragnar. The general from the Jotun empire sure had an epic story, even if Lex didn't know too much of it. But, again, he was strong and accomplished, but nowhere near supernatural enough.

One by one, Lex went through the list of his guests. He considered the bodyguard he had during the Midnight games, he considered Loretta's dad, he considered the various beasts he'd met and more.

None of them had done things crazy enough for him to suspect they had a system. However, there were a few things that caught Lex's interest.

Maybe if Lex wasn't sitting in the meditation room, which boosts his focus and concentration, and maybe if he wasn't wearing his thinking cap, Lex might not have remembered, or even considered these few suspicious points.

The first was that the Sovereign Galactic turtle could influence his system. Not only that, the system had 'hired' the turtle on its own. This was much too suspicious. Lex could not explain it and his 'authority' was not high enough for Mary to explain it to him yet.

It came to the point where Lex began to wonder if the turtle had some kind of interference system that only worked on other systems, allowing him to share some of the authority. Still, Lex left some room in his mind to consider the fact that there was much he didn't understand yet about systems, and there could be other answers. Maybe the turtle's race was special and was being treated as such by the system.

The next thing Lex noticed, or rather remembered, was that he encountered a few people his system could not scan. To be more specific, it scanned them, but Lex only got an error message.

One was the bodyguard he had during the Midnight games. This was the only reason Lex still didn't know his real name, and only later learned that he belonged to some race known as the Celestials. The second was his temporary worker, John.

Just the error message was not enough to prove anything, but the error could possibly be explained with the statement that only a system was another system's weakness.

Still, this was not enough to be sure. It was, however, enough to suspect them a little. His bodyguard was too strong, not to mention out of reach, but John was available right at his Inn.

He asked Mary if John had done anything suspicious, but the man had never done anything other than work and often visited the Mystery trial. During the invasion the Inn suffered, he helped out a bit, but none of his performance was too out of the ordinary.

Lex told her to keep an eye on him and let him know if anything popped up.

But other than those two people, he could not even begin to even mildly suspect that anyone had a system. It made sense, to be honest, for if systems were commonplace, then they would not be such a secret.

Lex spent the rest of the day planning his future actions, and how he planned on growing the Inn, as well as becoming stronger.

The next day, Lex was faced with some good and some bad news.

The bad news, predictably, was that a lot of people died. Dino and his wife's entire family was gone, as well as all their friends and everyone they knew from their neighborhood.

The good news was that, since the triplets had several murders take place near their house, their entire family had moved out of fear. They were temporarily living in a town shelter. When darkness fell, they had been protected by the town guards and moved into the underground bunkers, which had been kept well lit using candles and lanterns. When Zagan attacked, the entrance to the bunker had been destroyed, but fortunately they had been rescued before all those trapped ran out of oxygen.

Lex also found out that the Noel family would be migrating a large number of people to rebuild and repopulate Babylon as they said it was a strategic point too valuable to give up. Lex did not comment.

Instead, he turned his attention to Aegis. Fenrir had hunted all night long and the effects had been drastic. Though the pup was completely covered in wounds, he was not deterred. In fact, he started to display a bit of bloodlust that even Lex could feel. Even the look in his eyes became more savage.

The change had been so drastic that Lex stopped the hunt temporarily to let him recover, both physically and mentally.

Aegis was waiting patiently for Lex to give his next request for he was extremely parched and it was not water that would quench his thirst.

"Sit," said Lex, as he invited the man to a private room. "Before we get on to the matter of further payment, would you mind telling me why you were looking for me."

Aegis showed signs of struggle for a mere moment before he shamelessly betrayed his father.

"Old pops wanted me to go and get your cultivation technique. He told me to agree to whatever price you wanted, so long as you agreed to hand over the True path cultivation technique."

Lex raised an eyebrow out of curiosity. There was a lot to unpack from that one simple statement, but he didn't want to divert his attention from his quest for now. He had only 2 days left and he had to use them wisely.

"For the next part of the payment... tell me about yourself."

"Myself?" Aegis repeated, surprised.

"Yes, tell me about yourself. About why you started drinking in the first place. Tell me in detail, don't skip over anything."

This time, Aegis struggled a bit longer. The look in his eyes was of one who did not want to look back at life, of one who had suffered immense torture and struggle. His eyes were a well filled only with pain, and now someone had asked him to bring out that pain, one bucket at a time.

Still, the struggle did not last long. He gave in, and with a deep, depressed sigh, began talking.

"I started drinking because... life was just too damn boring. It's just... it's just, so so boring. When I was a few years old, maybe 6 or 7, I heard someone mention that old pops was really strong because he cultivated the True path. I looked at the cultivation technique and, after a few days, learned all of it and began cultivating even in my sleep. Then I heard Kraven were very strong, so I went to kill them, but then I killed so many that old pops came and stopped me. I heard girls were..."

"Wait wait wait wait," said Lex, suddenly freezing. "You're saying... the King actually prevented you from killing too many Kraven?"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 376: Lucky chance

"Wait, you're saying the King prevented you from killing Kraven?" asked Lex, realizing he had finally touched upon the real secrets of this realm.

"Yeah," replied Aegis, not at all phased by the severity of what he was revealing. "I was very young back then, like maybe 11 years old, so old pops never really knew who I was yet. But when I started killing too many Kraven, he had to come and stop me. He said I was too young, and wanted to hide my potential."

Lex calmed down a bit upon hearing that. If it was to protect and hide a very promising child, then preventing him from killing Kraven made sense. It was still not incriminating enough.

"He said I should hide properly until I'm stronger and just focus on cultivation because it wasn't really easy. I got really excited when he said that. I never knew what it meant for something to be hard, everything was always so easy. But in the end, it turned out to be a lie. My cultivation was slowed because I was cultivating the True path, but I still easily reached the immortal realm.

"Everything I did was too easy. Learning was easy, fighting was easy, cultivating was too easy, killing Kraven was too easy, finding a girlfriend was too easy. Life was just so boring. In the end, I gave up.

There was nothing fun to do at all. I even considered taking on the Kraven in a war, but old pops stopped me again."

At this point, Aegis stopped, his drunken visage retreating a bit and his expression turning serious.

"When I told old pops about my conundrum, he offered me a new solution. He wanted me to defeat him, and if I did, I could become king. He said the challenge of running a country was immense, since it did not depend just on my efforts, but on the efforts of all its people. The offer finally enticed me. So we fought.

"It shouldn't have been hard. I had never lost a fight before, and pops and I were in the same realm."

At this point, Aegis trembled.

"But man oh man, a single slap from the old man nearly killed me. All the bones in my body broke and, in fact, shards of my ribs filled my lungs. To top it off, my spirit was completely disoriented and my soul seemed to lose its shape.

"But it wasn't all bad. I was excited, in fact. I finally found something that wasn't easy."

He paused again, and looked at Lex with red eyes full of tears.

"Can you imagine? Finally, for the first time in my life, I found a challenge. I found something that I couldn't accomplish with just a little bit of effort. I found something to work towards. I trained like a mad man, and improved beyond what I could have even thought, yet still only a single slap put me out of commission.

"But, instead of being deterred, I was even more excited. I worked, for years and years and years, training and growing beyond anything anyone can imagine. I fought Kraven and Crystal race alike until I could find no threats, I fought monsters born in caves so deep underground they've never seen light for as long as time has existed. My strength grew and even my realm grew, until I reached the very peak of the Earth Immortal realm, surpassing my father who was still somewhere in the middle.

"After all of that, when we finally fought again, this time he didn't even need to slap me." Aegis started laughing as tears streamed down his face.

"He didn't need to slap me. He simply blew a whistle, the tune of which caused my spirit to collapse, putting me in a coma for years."

The drunk began laughing as if he told the funniest joke ever heard, yet the tears never stopped rolling down his face.

"Can you imagine the feeling of finally finding something to look forward to, but it's not a challenge? Instead, it's an impossibility!"

For a long time, Aegis continued to laugh, while Lex felt slightly bad for him. Based on the little he heard, Aegis seemed to be some kind of never before seen genius, learning everything with ease. But the first time he encountered a challenge, it was instead an impossible wall to overcome.

But fortunately, if this is what caused him to start drinking, he had a few ideas on how to solve it. But first...

"Why did the King continue to stop you from killing the Kraven even after you became an immortal?"

"He said that, instead of the strength of one man, humankind needed to grow strong in its entirety. He said that even if I killed all the Kraven, some other threat would replace them. The only real answer was that if the entire human race started producing geniuses like me more frequently."

Lex frowned. One need not be a genius to know that the King was just providing a barely logical sounding reason to prevent the Kraven from being eradicated. This was such a strong contrast between the ideology he spread amongst the common people of the nation that Lex could not identify what the real reason behind it was.

"Do you know if any of the other races do the same thing, by preventing the truly strong cultivators from eradicating the Kraven?"

"I'm not sure. All I know is that the Kraven no longer try to invade the Crystal race. The last time they did, the Crystal race retaliated so strongly that the Kravens war with all the races was affected. Unfortunately, the Crystal race isn't too interested in the state of the realm, since no one can really affect them.

"The truth is, although I said that no one in the Crystal race could fight me, that was only counting Crystals around my own age. As an immortal race, they have way too many unbelievably strong cultivators just randomly sleeping around.

"For the rest though... maybe on average, humans aren't as strong as them, but humans have their own advantages. We are not pushovers either."

Lex pursed his lips as he thought hard. The old man from the Crystal race told him that those that needed to know the truth of the Kraven knew it, and the way for him to learn was becoming important enough to have them tell him.

He could tell that Aegis was on the periphery of that list, but not quite on it. He had not earned the trust of his father, or proven himself enough, and quite frankly, Lex could understand why. He had not hesitated at all to sell out the trust of his father, or maybe he never even perceived this information as a secret at all to begin with.

Whatever the case, it made sense that he had not been brought into the fold.

Yet Lex was not ready to give up so quickly. Maybe he didn't know about the Kraven, but his position still exposed him to many secrets. Lex would thoroughly take advantage of this situation.

"What do you know of the Noel family?" Lex asked, diverting the topic.

"Joseph Noel was a common adventurer who stumbled onto some huge secrets," Aegis replied just as casually as before. "But he was smart about it. Instead of trying to hoard everything for himself, he made a pact with old pops and gained his protection. In exchange for his protection, he offered old pops a lot of immortal grade treasures. I don't know all the treasures he provides, to be honest, but I know a few. In fact, I'm pretty sure that there is an ancient Trelop graveyard under this town, full of immortal grade fruits. I remember right before I became an immortal old pops offered me one of the fruits. It really helped with my breakthrough."

Lex's eyes lit up as he thought of many ideas. A secret garden full of valuable fruits. He wondered if he could find anything that would be useful to him.

Moreover, since Joseph had proven himself a smart and capable partner of the Kings, Lex wondered if he was exposed to the secrets of the Kraven.

Lex asked a few more questions and when he was satisfied, moved onto actually trying to remedy Aegis' alcoholism. Though the man was 88 years old, Lex felt that in many ways, he was actually still a kid. His exposure was limited and so was his thought process.

"Listen here," said Lex, leaning forward over the table as he looked him in the eyes. "I'm about to reveal the secret of why you can't beat your father to you, so pay attention."

Lex's words struck Aegis hard, and he immediately started paying attention even though in his mind he was skeptical. He had simply accepted his father as all powerful.

"The way Joseph discovered some secrets, so did your dad," said Lex, completely making something up. "And now its your luck kid, because you've encountered your lucky chance as well."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 377: Return of the Butter Knife

"What do you mean?" Aegis asked, feeling confused.

"You guys are in the same realm, yet you cannot even touch your fathers sleeve. Don't you think it's unusual?"

There was a gleam in Lex's eyes as he recalled several novels in his mind. Good fiction was rooted in the truth, and so nothing he said could deviate too far from the truth.

"Isn't it normal? He's old pops, founder of the Hum nation. How can he achieve so much if he was normal?"

"That's different," Lex said as he shook his head. "I'm sure that you have realized that not everyone is as talented as you. Not everyone can cultivate as easily as you, nor do they achieve things at the same rate as you."

"Of course I understand," replied Aegis. "If everyone was as talented as me, pops would not need to stop me from killing the Kraven. "It's because they're not as talented as me that we're in this situation."

"Well, now that you know everyone is not as talented as you, do you really believe that the only reason your old man is stronger than you is because he's more talented than you?"

Before Aegis even had the time to answer, Lex continued.

"Because I can firmly tell you he's not. In fact, I can firmly tell you that the relationship between talent and strength is not nearly as important as you think it is. Otherwise the human race would be doomed. After all, most humans can't even cultivate the true path. Everyone is stuck on a single path, yet that does not stop them from reaching the immortal realm."

In fact, Lex had no idea what it took to reach the immortal realm, but he knew that according to his professor there were only very few True path cultivators, perhaps in the single digits, and though immortal cultivators were rare, they were not nearly as rare as that.

"Moreover, you may think that even if they reach the immortal realm, they're not as strong as you, or your dad. But I can tell you clearly that there are many people, many humans, who are not even tenth as talented as you, who are much, much stronger than you."

Aegis looked at Lex skeptically, but before he could speak, Lex continued.

"Maybe you're having a hard time believing me, but that's because your knowledge is extremely limited. For example..."

Lex used the tavern's formation to create a 'room' right around Aegis' body and trapped him where he stood. Shock filled his eyes as he tried to resist, but he could do nothing as Lex slowly lifted his body in the air, twisted him around and sat him back down.

"Don't overreact, I'm about to let you go," said Lex a few seconds before letting the formation rest and having the room around Aegis disappear.

Aegis did not react once he found he was freed, but he was certainly alarmed. It had been a long time since he felt so helpless. True, he did not go all out with his strength in resisting the power that held him, but as an immortal, it was not so easy to trap him to begin with.

"The point of showing you that was not to intimidate you, but to make you realize that there are many things that exist in this universe of which you have no idea. Your father may not be as talented as you, but he's much stronger than you. Why is that? The answer is simple, he had tools or opportunities that helped him push his strength far past what you can dream.

"It's like you're trying to fight him with a butter knife while he wields a sword. No matter how talented you are, a butter knife is no match for a full sword. But compared to your father, you're not even holding a butter knife. You're holding a toothpick and he has a spear. There is no comparison at all."

Aegis was extremely skeptical, but he was also hooked. He wanted to deny everything, and just accept that his old man was akin to a deity, invincible and undefeatable. But, a small, resilient voice in his heart refused to give up. It wanted to hold on so badly to any hope at all, and kept him from completely accepting defeat.

"So, what are you saying? That you can help me defeat old pops?"

"Not at all," Lex clarified. "I just said that your old man no doubt had some kind of lucky encounter that helped him reach his current level of strength. As for whether you can reach his level of strength, or surpass it, is completely up to you. What I can offer you is an opportunity. What you make of it is up to you."

Aegis bit his lower lip and looked down to the ground, a million thoughts racing through his head. At this point, he had completely forgotten his original objective of getting Lex's cultivation technique. To be entirely honest, he did not care about it at all, nor did the title of the crown prince entice him. He had long since gone past his pursuit of wanting to find something difficult to challenge him.

Now all he wanted was to overcome the obsession in his heart of defeating his own father and then, maybe, look for something in life to live for. There were hundreds of billions of humans in the crystal realm, he didn't believe that he was unable to connect with any of them.

"Alright, I'll take it. I'll take whatever you have to offer," he said, his voice a mix of desperation and dedication.

"Not so easy there," Lex said, as he leaned back against his chair. "I have an opportunity for you, yes. But I never said I'll give it to you for free."

"What do you want?" Aegis asked with pain filling his heart. Just because he was desperate didn't mean he was stupid. He knew that people might want to take advantage of him and his situation. A part of him even accepted that Lex was about to scam him when he heard talk of price, but he asked the question nonetheless, he was just that desperate.

"Want? Nothing. But the opportunity I have can't be given so easily just to anyone. The person has to be worthy of it so, now, before I give it to you, or even tell you about it, you have a choice to make."

Slowly Lex lifted his hand and revealed the small jade bottle from which he had gotten his previous drink, before placing it on the table in front of Aegis.

"You have to choose. You can choose the drink in front of you, and get lost in the feeling it provides you. Or, you can take an oath, the most powerful, meaningful oath you can, to never touch any intoxicant again until you defeat your father."

Lex paused for a moment for Aegis to absorb his words, then said, "Now choose."

There was a slight moment of relief as Aegis was finally convinced Lex was not trying to scam him. After all, it made sense for Lex to only want to give the opportunity he wanted to the most worthy.

But that relief was followed by an intense struggle. He wanted that drink so bad. The sensation, the feeling, the pleasure it gave was all too great. But the small voice in his heart could not let go. Finally, when it could see hope again, it could not give up. At first it was only a small voice, but eventually it consumed him until Aegis could no longer see the bottle, but only the defeated figure of his father.

Suddenly, he stood up, pushing away the seat upon which he sat, and said in an ominous voice, "I swear upon the tenets of my immortality that I, Aegis Cornelius, will never touch another drink again until I have defeated my father."

As the echo of his voice dimmed, Aegis' aura exploded and his entire being seemed to undergo a huge change.

If Lex hadn't locked Aegis down in a small room, the aura from his sudden elevation would have squashed all the surviving residents of Babylon and destroyed the tavern building. His drunk eyes seemed to clear as drive and focus filled them, and his languid posture straightened to that of a soldier.

Lex cared for none of that, though. He instead, was focused on his system notification.

New Notification: Quest complete!

Reward: Midnight Signature Brew Coffee, 1 Minute Butter Knife token

Lex was perplexed since the reward for this quest had already been declared as only the signature coffee brew, so where did this new token come from? He read its description to further investigate.

1 Minute Butter Knife token

The butter knife is the God of all weapons and a measly spear is pudding in front of it. Use this token to strengthen the Butter knife to its final form for 1 minute.

Remarks: Even the Gods will kneel before toast that has been buttered well!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 378: Only the best

Lex had to stifle his laugh as he read the remarks for the 1 Minute Butter Knife token. It seemed the system had felt offended at his disregard of the Butter Knife. To be honest, his remark had been somewhat motivated by how little the knife had helped him of late.

Indeed in the beginning it had helped him, but even with its upgrade from Butter Knife to Fruit Knife, it was merely able to handle Golden core cultivators. Sure, that was still above Lex's power level, but he had many powerful workers at the Inn now in front of whom a measly Golden core cultivator was nothing.

But it seemed he had taken the Butter knife lightly, as its upgrade sounded monumentally strong. Its description did not give an exact power level at which the knife was effective, but the remarks made it sound especially strong.

Lex knew that the system liked to joke or make fun of him, but in these matters it was extremely serious. Just the mention of so-called 'Gods' in the remarks made Lex believe that it was incredibly powerful. Well, he hoped he was not wrong, and so he kept it as a backup during an emergency.

After all, unlike the Butter Knife itself, which could only be used within the Midnight Inn, the token could be used by him anywhere.

It was a decent reward, not to mention the original reward.

Midnight Signature Brew Coffee:

A reinvigorating brew that can completely replenish a drained mind for an hour. Can be strengthened to match various cultivation levels based on the Hosts authority. Repeated use in a short time reduces its effects.

It was not a bad addition, and it was relatively cheap. But, since the strength of the coffee could be changed based on the cultivation level, he decided to use different prices for different levels. While the most basic version, which reinvigorated Qi training cultivators had a profit of only 1 MP, the highest authority Lex had to serve, which was the Nascent level, had a profit margin of 150 MP.

But Lex moved his thoughts away from his notification and turned his attention back to Aegis. Now that he had completed his quest, it was now time to deliver. Even for that, Lex's capitalistic mind- eh, no, his resourcefulness, allowed him to come up with a plan that would benefit them both.

Lex waited a few more minutes for Aegis' apparent breakthrough to conclude and for him to settle down, before he asked, "Tell me, Aegis, what do you know about the universe?"

"The universe?" Aegis repeated, confused.

Lex had been speaking their local language, so the word he used for 'universe' was correct, but therein lay the issue. Whenever anyone referred to their world or area within which they exist, they used the word 'realm'. Even the word 'universe' was a secret known only to a few, to the point where it was completely alien to Aegis.

"Simply put, the world that you know, the realm, the people, everything is only a small part of a much bigger one, that being the universe. The entire Crystal realm is like a grain of sand compared to the universe at large, and it is full of countless other realms just like the Crystal realm.

"There, not only can you meet those much stronger than yourself, you can learn and experience things far beyond your imagination."

"The Ascension realm!" Aegis suddenly said with a startled face, as if suddenly realizing something.

"There are rumors that when someone surpasses the Earth Immortal realm, the Crystal realm can no longer accommodate them, and sends them away to the Ascension realm! Honestly, for fear of being sent away is the only reason I can think of for why my father hasn't broken through yet! So it's true..."

Lex paused, for he had just heard something new. No one had mentioned this so-called Ascension realm to him so far, but it made sense since he was so far away from entering the immortal realm. But whatever it was, he was glad that Aegis knew of it, for it made his job easier.

"Yes, like the Ascension realm. But even that realm is merely one of many, many realms in the vast, never ending universe. Yet despite its vastness, there exists a place that can reach even the far corners of the universe, and can connect all the many realms. The name of that place... is the Midnight Inn."

Lex barely whispered the name, yet it clapped like thunder in Aegis' ears. He could not even imagine, despite his immense strength, a place that could connect all the realms in the so-called 'universe'. In fact, he could barely comprehend that there existed more realms even beyond the Ascension realm.

Suddenly a thought occurred to him and his eyes shrunk to pinholes.

"Midnight tavern," he said, as if just the name was a connection unto itself.

Lex merely smiled, and made no comment on that. Instead, he continued with his explanation.

"The Midnight Inn is a place where everyone is welcome as a guest, so long as one follows the rules. Yet one has to be extremely lucky if they wish to become something more than a simple guest at the Inn, and actually work for it. The opportunity I can present you with is a single chance to try and become an employee of the Inn. Of course, it's completely up to you if you don't want to, and can back out right up until the last moment if you think it isn't worth it. But, at least, you can go there and see for yourself."

Aegis absorbed the information, and though he didn't show it on his face, he had doubts about becoming an employee for a place he didn't understand. Fortunately, Lex was in no rush - mostly because golden and platinum keys couldn't be used here until he officially returned to the Inn and linked the Crystal realm to the Inn.

"You don't have to decide so quickly, for it will take me some time before I can provide you with the opportunity to enter the Inn. But just know this, I can provide you with an opportunity to enter the Inn for free - once. But if you really want to avail the chance and become an employee, you have to do something else first."

"What's that?"

"Nothing much, you simply have to deliver a platinum key to Zagan, and convince him to use it."

Aegis smiled weakly. Of course, nothing so great could come easily. The question was... how was he even supposed to track the ocean king? Even though he didn't know what he would do in the future, he began planning already for how to find the monster.

In front of Cornelius stood Nora Haugen, his wife, and Cwenhild Haugen Cornelius, his daughter. Though something unusual was that his daughter seemed to have lost all of her cultivation, and was akin to a mortal. Yet she was not disappointed with that fact. Instead, there was a hint of pride hidden in her eyes.

"So you've succeeded?" Cornelius asked.

"Yes, and I'm here to complete our deal," said Nora, as she handed Cornelius a crystal with Cwenhild's latest cultivation method inside of it. Throughout this process, Cwenhild said nothing. The reason for that was her mother had sealed her mouth and body, for the little girl would no doubt pick a fight with Cornelius. She couldn't allow her daughter to ruin her plans when they were about to bear fruit.

"Good job little Cwen," he said, not letting on the fact that he had once again forgotten about her right up until they showed up here.

"You will be my second child to cultivate the True path, though I hope your performance is better than little Aegis. If you're half as good as that Lex child once you start on the True path, I'll consider rewarding you again."

Cwenhild, because she was frozen still, could not show her alarm when she heard Lex was a True path cultivator, but suddenly everything made so much sense. No wonder he was so strong. But after amazement, sorrow filled her heart.

Despite everything Nora told her, she still considered Lex as her half-brother and had already decided that he must have had a very tragic past. Hopefully, his future would be better.

"We'll be off then," Nora said, and summoned the metallic card given to her by Cornelius as payment for the technique.

She held onto her daughter's shoulder and crushed it, disappearing instantly from where they stood.

A second later, they appeared in a hall in an entirely different realm, with an old man with a long, white beard standing waiting for them.

"Welcome to Ventura, the largest school in the universe," the man said politely. "If you have arrived here, you most likely already know our policies, but I will repeat them for you nonetheless.

"Here, in Ventura, we only accept the best of the best. Whether it's your talent, your will, your character, your determination, your cultivation, or anything else, at least some aspect of yours needs to be of sufficient standard to gain entry. But fret not, for if you fail our admission test, there is still hope for you in one of our subsidiary schools, such as Ventura Platinum, Amethyst, Gold and so on. Now, which one of you will be taking the test, or will it be the both of you?"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 379: Appreciation

"This is not part of our deal," said Joseph warily, as he eyed the crown prince of Hum. It had been a few days since they last met and Joseph was busy taking care of things, still trying to understand exactly how or why the formation lost control.

Yet while the duration was small, the change in his demeanor was massive. No longer did he look like a sickly child, moving lazily to do a tedious chore. He was a man with a straight back and a fire in his eyes. Everything from the way he looked to his expression, his voice and even his actions seemed to have changed. While previously he was indifferent to the world, now his every action was filled with purpose.

"To be clear, this is not a part of your deal with Hum. This is a deal you're making with me, Aegis. Name your price, you will find that my reach will surpass your expectations. But at the same time, do not think this is something that can be avoided. At times, it is simply best to make use of the opportunity before you."

Joseph actually felt a great threat from Aegis as he said this. He was literally being blackmailed into selling secrets to Aegis, and being threatened of the consequences if he continued to state a price. Basically, Aegis did not care how high or low the price was, so long as one existed.

As much as he hated being bullied like this, he had to face the truth that in both status and strength he was below Aegis, and so there was really nothing left to negotiate with. He had to concede.

Suddenly, he had an idea.

"In fact, there is something you can help me with. A son of mine broke off his engagement with his former finance, who is from a family of... great means. If you can get rid of the pressure from that family and ensure they won't attack us in the future, the prize will be yours."

"Simple enough," Aegis commented blandly. "Tell me the name and location of this family. I will deal with the situation myself."

"Excellent."

It had been over ten days since Lex last spoke to Aegis, and the man had disappeared since. That did not worry Lex, as the man had taken his oath and was definitely interested in what Lex had to offer.

Well, if he didn't, Lex would find some other way to hire Zagan.

Though that was not his concern right now. Currently, he was watching the finale of the Lady Cosmos show. The winner, after a lot of drama, was the Fox from Nibiru called Jill. Not only was she officially crowned the first, intergalactic Lady Cosmos, but she was awarded a cash prize equivalent to 30 million MP, raised from the profits the show generated. Of course, they were only a small portion of the profits.

Jill, now an extremely wealthy woman, decided not to return to Nibiru. She had not taken up Lex's offer to work as an employee at the Inn yet, but with 30 million MP, and a normal room costing 50 MP a night, she had 600,000 days to decide on an alternative solution.

Once the show concluded, the number of guests at the Inn began to drop drastically, so much so that for the first time in a while, Lex had fewer than a million guests.

Though he did not mind whatsoever. Just from his own profits, Lex had generated a massive 22 billion MP more in the last few days, and 770 million MP was given to him by the Lady Cosmos show as his share of the profits.

This put his total MP to 31.9 billion MP. Suffice to say Lex was not worried about his finances at the moment.

In fact, it was to the degree that he had been dropping MP like crazy to accumulate energy. At the moment, he had already filled his progress bar to 91%. If he still had his elevated authority he would have been tempted to stay a little longer and use this accumulated energy to enhance the Inn. Now all he wanted to do was return home - to the Midnight Inn.

Especially because, in another 10 days, Harry Styles would officially be marrying Hailey, the contestant from the Lady Cosmos show.

He did not want to miss the wedding. After all, it was the first time one of his employees would be getting married.

During this time work on the reconstruction of the town Babylon had already begun, and because of the intensive requirement in labor, everyone had been conscripted. As such, Lex had almost no guests these days, and any who came would usually only stay for a meal.

It was almost, because he did have one guest staying - Roland.

The young entrepreneur had become an orphan, like many other of his friends. He did not have a massive outburst like many of the other children when he heard the news, but he had barely spoken since. While the other children had been taken into the care of the town, Roland somehow convinced the mayor to let him be on his own. He had since been living at the tavern.

Lex had tried striking up a conversation a few times, but the boy was not ready to speak just yet.

While Lex was lost in his own thoughts, Rick knocked on his door and told him that Aegis had come to see him.

Curious as to what the crown prince wanted, he got up and walked into the main hall where, surprisingly, Aegis was sitting on a table with Roland. The two had been whispering something, but the moment Lex entered they hushed up.

"I heard you were looking for me," Lex inquired politely, more interested in what he had been talking to the child about.

"Yes. I know you did not ask for it, but I cannot accept favors from others lightly. Though it pales greatly in comparison with what you're offering, I got something as a token of my appreciation."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 380: Glow

Lex was taken by surprise as he was honestly not expecting it. Mostly it was because the 'opportunity' he was presenting to Aegis was already actually taking advantage of him to do his own work.

Still, he could understand the gesture. After all, as a crown prince, he was surely taught etiquette and surely put a great deal of emphasis on reciprocation.

"You really did not need to," said Lex, "but since you have already gotten something, I will not refuse your good will."

"Great," Aegis said with a hint of excitement in his voice. "We need to go somewhere to get to it, so whenever you're ready we can head out."

Had it been before, Lex would have hesitated to leave the tavern. He had already exposed himself and if he left the boundary of the tavern he would have been defenceless. But, since he had the Butter knife token, Lex could barely convince himself to head out. After all, in matters such as this, he still trusted the system's integrity.

"We can head out now," said Lex casually, as if he had nothing to lose by leaving the tavern building.

He passed a few instructions to Roan in case they had guests while they were gone, and left the tavern with Aegis.

"Do you mind if I speed us there?" asked Aegis once they stepped out.

Since the tavern did not have the same protection as the Inn, Lex's foundation realm cultivation was evident for all to see. Some were convinced he was actually just hiding his own cultivation level and was secretly an expert. Aegis did not try to test him and directly proposed taking the both of them himself.

Once Lex agreed, he placed a hand on Lex's shoulder and rushed them to the other side of Babylon. It barely took a single second. Yet from the tavern building they had quickly arrived at one of the latest buildings that had been temporarily set up whilst reconstruction took place.

He led Lex in, where Joseph and Berterm were waiting for them.

"The formation is ready, I can take you in whenever," said Joseph, leaving his son behind to stand guard.

With a nod from Aegis, they prepared the formation and stepped on it. Like an elevator, the formation started to descend downwards - only it seemed to be taking them down directly through the ground.

Lex did not let his surprise show and only calmly observed as they descended for a good two minutes, before arriving in some kind of underground cave.

The cave was filled with a sharp, blue light that illuminated every nook and cranny, even causing Lex to squint. Yet the blue light was not a fashion choice, and was being exuded by a single, small crystal.

Lex did not need to be introduced to know that he had arrived in front of some kind of immense treasure, for the cave was so dense with spiritual energy that it started to condense right on Lex's skin. Had his meridians not been remolded out of metal, he would have suffered from spiritual energy poisoning just from standing there.

The two immortals that came along with Lex slightly nodded at the scene of him being unaffected by the spiritual energy, silently confirming that he was well above his apparent cultivation level.

Normally, Lex would have caught the action, but currently he was too distracted by a voice speaking directly in his mind.

"Mr. Innkeeper sir, I detect something amazing in front of you," said the juvenile voice of the Lotus in his mind. "Can I have it please Mr. Innkeeper sir? I'll pay you back, I promise!"

In his mind, Lex visualized a child tearing up as he heard the Lotus' pleading. He had no idea what the crystal was, but if even the Lotus wanted it, it had to be amazing.

"It's not much," said Aegis, "but please accept this token of gratitude from me."

Joseph was startled by what he heard, and suddenly started wondering what had happened between the two, but knew better than to ask.

"I've kept a small piece of the crystal as well to lure out Zagan when I need to, but the rest is all here."

The shining crystal was only as large as an adult human fingernail, but its small size did not deceive Lex at all. It must be filled with either immense power or energy.

'How can I give it to you?' Lex asked the Lotus.

"Just eat it, and I'll absorb it from within your body!" the lotus exclaimed with shrieking excitement. This was the first time in its short life it had ever wanted something, and the first time it was getting it. The experience was overwhelming, especially since the noble Innkeeper had to suffer a loss just so that it could have the crystal.

How was the Lotus to ever know that to Lex, the Lotus was already way more valuable than any crystal.

"Well don't mind if I help myself," said Lex out loud and walked up to the crystal.

Joseph was just about to explain to Lex the safety precautions required to handle the extremely radioactive crystal when his jaw dropped as he saw Lex pick the crystal from the cave wall and pop it in his mouth like a tic tac.

He did not even need to swallow it, as the moment the crystal touched his tongue it was absorbed into his body, filling him with overwhelming heat.

But, just as quickly as the heat arrived it disappeared, leaving only the sensation of warmth on his back where he had a Lotus tattoo.

Joseph and Aegis both had not recovered from the horror they had just witnessed when Lex released a comfortable groan.

A pool of spiritual energy had started flowing through his body, quickly elevating his cultivation level. In a matter of moments, it raised his cultivation level to the peak of the Foundation realm.

When his body could absorb no more, the energy instead started being absorbed by the system. The progress bar instant crossed 100%, and in fact had already reached 379%. But the energy in his body kept overflowing, and soon, his body started to release a blue glow!