

Innkeeper 391

The Innkeeper

Chapter 391: Cliffhangers ahead

Lex smiled because he had finally been encountering some easy quests. Before, from quests ranging to recruiting an immortal behemoth to visiting a 5 star planet, and developing a permanent guest district, Lex kept getting quests way beyond his capabilities.

Lately though, finally, he had some good ones.

He shook his head, denying himself the hope that his luck was getting better, and looked at his rewards.

Fire Temple

A building to host divinities with a fiery temperament, though others can visit it as well. It contains all the basic necessary facilities required by a divine being. Must be built in an extremely hot environment.

New worker class unlocked: Draconian Apostle.

Draconian Apostle

An Insecta found in only the most hazardous environments, these extremely versatile can freely adapt the structure of their bodies to suit their survival needs. A powerful but simple minded race, their lives are hollow until they find a master to serve, or an ideology to propagate.

This... was a surprise. Lex always knew he would eventually hire workers that were nonhumans, but he always thought he would need to take the initiative in finding them. To be honest, he was so comfortable with humans that he hadn't really felt the need to hire races. In fact, he somewhat believed that his perception as the Innkeeper had strongly been tied to humans or at least humanoid creatures, for even the Henali sent all humanoid representatives to greet him.

But before he even got around to it, the system had provided him with a new race, or as it called it, class of workers.

He spent 5000 MP to purchase a Draconian Apostle to see what they looked like, and get a better understanding of them. All he understood, so far, was that they were some kind of insect.

Though what he was mentally prepared for, and what appeared in front of him were completely different. A three feet long honey bee appeared in front of him, wearing the signature suit all Midnight Inn employees wore.

Its yellow fur made the suit fitting look fluffy and snug, while its two massive eyes on the sides of its head made it look like it was in a perpetual state of puppy dog eyes. It made a gentle buzzing sound as it hovered in the air in front of it, but it was actually quite pleasing.

"Greetings, Innkeeper," whispered a cute, baby voice in his head.

"Greetings," replied Lex verbally, testing if the Apostle could hear. "Introduce yourself and what you're capable of doing."

"My name is Fredrich. I can do most basic physical and spiritual tasks, and have a racial advantage in building stable structures in extremely volatile areas. For my survival, I cannot long stay in such a... temperate environment, and am best suited for places with extreme heat, cold, radioactive decay, strong electrical clouds etc. I can change my shape as needed to suit my environment and task.

"The cultivation of my species is dependent heavily on the environment in which we live. The more chaotic environment we are able to adapt to, the stronger we will become. Naturally, the environment must also have spiritual energy for us to grow from, but it need not be stable at all. In fact, it is best if it is even a little violent."

'So a race of masochist bees,' Lex mused.

"Take a look at this ravine, do you think you could survive there?" Lex asked as he pointed towards the ever growing pool of lava.

Fredrich took the request very seriously, and even flew down into the ravine to properly inspect everything. Due to the Draconian Apostle's being an entirely different race Lex could not determine its facial expressions, or even detect the to be honest, but his instincts let him know that the was filled with excitement as it flew back.

"This area is perfect for me, and will greatly boost my cultivation!" he said, barely able to suppress its joy.

"Alright in that case, whenever we have a guest come to this area, you will be incharge of taking care of their needs," decided Lex as he summoned a few more of them to give Fredrich some company.

With that done, Lex decided to place the Fire Temple within the ravine as well. As it turned out, the ravine was just large enough to accommodate the structure of an ancient mosque, with tall spires on four of its sides and a pointed domed structure in the middle as the temple itself.

Not interested in exposing himself to the heat of the lava, though he'd be protected from it anyway, Lex simply scanned the temple to see what it was like on the inside. Considering it had what all divinities needed, he was expecting to see a few rooms and amenities, but all he saw were several altars in closed off sections of the temple. Other than that it was very plain and mostly filled with decorations.

Lacking an adequate understanding of divinities, Lex simply shrugged and moved on.

He was feeling a little tired from meeting all his workers for the past several hours, so instead Lex decided to catch up on a few other tasks that were waiting for him, the primary of which was the gifts left behind for him by the Henali representatives.

There was an epistle with the words Henali embossed right onto it, a small sealed booklet which contained the conventions alongside a small, wooden chest that contained some kind of a gift for him.

Such official business was best conducted in his new office, so he retreated back to it and comfortably sat down on his chair. He had asked Mary to try and open them, but she had been unable to open it. There was a very decent chance that Lex himself wouldn't be able to open it either, but he would only find out by trying it out for himself.

After a moment's consideration, he reached towards the epistle first, since it was addressed to him directly. Supposedly it was an invitation to the Henali assembly, whatever that was.

He did not wait for dramatic effect and tried to open the epistle as soon as he got his hands on it but, predictably, nothing happened. The epistle did not open.

Lex sat back in his chair and frowned as he considered why he was unable to open it. Perhaps since they assumed him to be a Daolord, he needed the strength of a Daolord to open it in the first place. Such reasoning would make sense, and if that were the case, these items would remain untouched for a long time, if they were ever touched again at all.

While he was thinking, his sight wandered over the other items on the table, and he noticed the letter opener. Could it be..?

Lex scanned the items on the table, for he hadn't had a chance to earlier.

He started with the leatherbound journal, but discovered it was not a journal at all.

Midnight Inn Letterhead

An Inn, one as prestigious as this, cannot be without proper stationary. The Midnight letterhead can be used by the Innkeeper to write official letters or messages bound for outside the Inn. They will be tinged with the aura of the Innkeeper.

Innkeeper's Pen

Each of the Innkeeper's words is worth a hundred worlds. Writing anything with this pen will imbue the words with the aura of the Innkeeper.

Ink Well

The medium to carry power must be powerful as well. No word written with this ink may ever be misconstrued, misunderstood or manipulated to mean anything other than what the author's intentions entail.

Innkeepers Letter opener

A prestigious man must have prestigious friends. An exchange between people of status needs proper etiquette. The letter opener uses the aura of the Innkeeper to open letters and packages addressed to the Innkeeper to confirm the identity of the recipient.

Innkeeper's business cards

Everyone cannot be everywhere all the time. These business cards carry the aura of the Innkeeper with them, and when spiritual energy is passed through them, a temporary clone linked to the Innkeeper's consciousness can appear. The Innkeeper can send it to those with whom he wishes to converse.

Lex was genuinely impressed by these items that had remained completely unmentioned so far. They were genuinely so useful for his identity as the Innkeeper, but the system had not deigned to mention them at all. Or maybe they were just a part of his new office, which is why the system did not give him individual notifications.

The business cards especially were blowing his mind and opened up so many potential options for him to continue to use his Innkeeper persona. He had been invited by the Henali to attend some kind of assembly, but Lex honestly had no intention of going. It would only expose him, and maybe even put his system at risk of being detected. But with such clones, he could now consider the option.

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Chapter 392: Entering the big leagues

He would find an opportunity to test the Innkeeper's business card on someone inconspicuous and test out its abilities and limitations. For now, however, he had another item he wanted to try.

He picked up the letter opener and, without waiting for the dramatic build up, used it to open the epistle. The wax seal easily came off, and the envelope unfurled on its own, revealing a single page that automatically began to hover in the air.

Due to the Universal Language converter that Lex had received he was able to pretty much read and write every language he ever encountered quite easily. In fact, it had been the reason he was able to communicate with the Kraven.

But when he saw the language written on the epistle, the beautiful purple calligraphy on the page, he knew two things immediately. First, regardless of whether he had the language converter or not, he would be able to understand everything this said. Second, he would have to learn some calligraphy of his own if he ever wanted to write a letter as the Innkeeper.

Putting away his random thoughts, Lex began to read.

'Honorable Innkeeper, your presence and activity in the Origin realm has been noted and acknowledged. The Henali would like to thank you for choosing the Origin realm to establish your business in, and would like to invite you to the centurial Henali assembly to meet and interact with other influential and like minded individuals.

'In case you are unfamiliar with the Henali assembly, it is a gathering that invites all those in the Origin realm who have touched upon the Dao, under the protection of the Henali, to come together and discuss current events. No affiliation is required to join the assembly, and attendees may keep their identity anonymous.

'The Henali assembly is also the only portal through which a Daolord can request to join the Henali court, and other essential, affiliate restricted events.

'This epistle also acts as a key to enter the assembly, and can only be activated in the first hour of the assembly.

'Henali looks forward to your attendance.

'Time to assembly: 104 hours, 33 minutes, 59 seconds.'

Lex read and reread the epistle time and time again, analyzing it for as much information as he could get. His heart beat extremely fast as he considered the possibility of going, and all the risks associated.

If he had to go in person, he would never ever risk meeting a Daolord for one simple reason. It did not take a genius to guess that the Daolord realm was even higher than the realm Bastet was in, since her cultivation was only titled as Demi-Daolord.

Moreover, since he now knew that high leveled cultivators could potentially detect his system, he was more than inclined to avoid them as much as possible. But the business card presented him with a potential solution.

Since the 'Innkeeper's aura' was being generated through the system, he would not doubt that it could emulate whatever strength people had associated with the Innkeeper, and since the event would be under the protection of the Henali, who or whatever they were, he would not have to take the risk of having his consciousness clone attacked or even analyzed in great detail.

He was extremely tempted, and his usual greed that was normally hidden once again showed its ugly head. This would be a great opportunity, and he could gain a lot... but at the same time, he was also risking a lot. Moreover, the assembly that happened only once a century was taking place a little over 4 days from now.

The timing was extremely unfortunate, for if it had been even a few years away Lex was confident he would be much better prepared to attend the event.

Still, time waits for no man, and he had a decision to make, and only a few days to make it.

Lex turned his head towards the other two things left behind by the Henali representatives. The wooden chest was apparently a gift, but the other was a copy of the Henali conventions.

Whether he would go or not, reading the conventions would greatly benefit him as they would supplement his understanding of the universe, or at least the Origin realm.

He picked up the purple tetragonal pyramid shaped crystal and tried to channel his spirit energy inside of it, but as expected, nothing happened. He then channeled his spirit energy into the crystal through his letter opener, and lo and behold, the crystal cracked, and a stream of energy flowed into Lex's mind.

Instead of merging into his memory, a sort of book appeared in his mind which he could open and peruse at any time. Just because the book was in his mind did not mean Lex had all the information memorized, but it did mean that Lex's reading speed would be astronomical.

Filled with anticipation, Lex began reading the conventions, and many things finally started making sense. At the same time, Lex finally understood why everyone was so afraid of Henali.

In the way that humans, devils and dragons were races, Henali was actually the name of a race. There was not much of a description of them in this book, as that was not entirely relevant to the conventions. What was mentioned, however, was that this entire massive Origin realm, that the humans on Earth used to previously consider the entire universe instead of just one realm of many, was but a single one of the realms that the Henali controlled, and their conventions applied in each and every realm that they owned.

Moreover, the reason Daolords were forbidden from participating in any civilization-related incident in the Origin realm was very simple. Much in the same way that the Earth Immortal realm was the peak of the Crystal realm, the Daolord realm was a level beyond the natural peak of the Origin realm. Should they use their strength, they would destabilize the entire realm.

After all, as the Origin realm was apparently only 19 billion years old, it was not mature enough to naturally support the existence of beings on such a high realm.

The more Lex read about the rules, the more goosebumps he kept on getting.

In the heart of the Origin realm existed a landmass that was impossibly large. It could not be called a planet, for what planet could be so large that it made galaxies look small? Yet despite its size that defied science, at least as Earthlings understood it, the landmass existed in a stable state. It supported life, had rich and diverse climates, was absurdly rich in spiritual energy so much so that instead of water, it often rained liquid energy, and most of all, did not seem to affect the entire Origin realm with its gravity that should have been strong beyond comprehension.

Yet it was not just the size of the mass that defied fact and fiction. Six chains, each consisting of links, each one larger than the entire solar system, protruded from the mass out into space.

As if that was not enough, each link on the chains also developed a climate of their own, and gave birth to unique lifeforms and never before seen races. Yet that was mere happenstance. The true purpose of the chains was to act as leashes, and the thing they leashed would startle anyone who even slightly understood the universe.

Six blackholes hovered around the mass, sucking everything the universe had to offer, yet at the same time, they seemed to be doing their best to run away from the landmass, as if they had some kind of sentience. Unfortunately for them, the chains that held them in place were not at all threatened by their awesome power.

On this landmass, somewhere, was a temple in which a bird, seemingly made out of pure energy, was reading some kind of book. It was engrossed, as if the world itself could not distract it from the secrets of the universe it was indulging in.

Yet a powerful bolt of energy struck it, knocking it off its perch and attracting its attention.

"Stop reading that perverted crap and get back to work," an ethereal voice thundered. "Another epistle has been opened, and so another Daolords presence has been confirmed. Add another chair to the assembly hall, and look into who the new Daolord could be. Also find out if they're participating in the Henali Champions tourney. The betting pool will open soon, so if there are any new participants we need to do our research."

The bird made of energy only rolled its eyes and, with an exhausted sigh, began obeying the voice's instructions.

If a knowledgeable person saw the bird they would be scared out of their wits, for this bird was exactly one of the few remaining Phoenix's in the Origin realm, and yet here it was, being treated like a servant. The phoenix, though, did not show any reluctance or hesitation as it began doing its work.

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Chapter 393: Fuegan

Lex spent a good while reading the Henali conventions, and then even longer pondering over what each convention meant, and the reasoning behind it.

Beside a brief introduction of the Henali race, as well as the Origin realm, right at the beginning, the rest was just a list of rules. Lex had to extrapolate a lot of information from the rules and make a lot of guesses, not to mention that these were the conventions that only applied to entities that touched upon the Dao.

There were actually only very few rules for such entities, but Lex estimated that for empires and lower-level people, there would be more rules.

The first and foremost rule was that beings that had touched upon the Dao realm were expressly forbidden from directly interfering, meaning using their own abilities in any way, with any civilization in the entire realm, regardless of how strong or weak they were.

The second rule was that, should they need to conduct a private battle, they had to stabilize the Origin realm around themselves first, by themselves. If any tear is detected in the realm because of them, they will be heavily fined.

Everything seemed fine and dandy so far, as the focus seemed to be on protecting the realm, but the conventions after this were what let Lex know that nothing was ever as simple as it seemed.

Any entity that touched upon the Dao, affiliated or unaffiliated, was to immediately report the presence of any so-called 'Fuegan invaders' and, in some cases, take direct action to eliminate them!

Though there was no explanation for what the Fuegan invaders were, upon reading a few more rules, Lex concluded that... there was a realm wide war going on in the Origin realm as well!

Unlike in the Crystal realm, where the origin of the Kraven was questionable, and the local leaders even took some actions to ensure they were not defeated too quickly, in the Origin realm the Fuegan invaders had to be dealt with on sight, and had been established as invaders from another realm!

Anyone who associates with the Fuegan invaders would immediately be identified and treated as an enemy by the Henali, and in the case of Daolords they would be expelled from the realm.

This rang alarm bells for Lex, for what would he do if a Fuegan arrived at the Inn as a guest? He did not know what a Fuegan was, so there was no reason to believe they would even be interested in being a guest, but that did not change the fact that one could end up being a guest.

He needed to understand more about the Fuegan and, more importantly, he needed to get his hand on the reward for discovering the anomaly in the Crystal realm. The reward was a realm seed, and would allow the Inn's space to form into its own realm. That way, they would technically no longer be within the Origin realm, so even if he had a Fuegan as a guest, he did not need to worry about being 'expelled' from the Origin realm.

This was because when it came to beings powerful enough to own and control multiple realms, he did not think for even a second that they would have a tough time locating the Inn, regardless of how easily the system hid it.

After all, the system had already shown that it was not perfect at hiding.

Lex kept reading, but the many conventions after seemed to slowly start getting extremely abstract, and beyond Lex's understanding. The few more that Lex was able to understand were fairly simple. Mass genocide was disallowed when taking control of a new planet, soul farming was forbidden, bloodline farming was forbidden, and no one was allowed to attempt a breakthrough into the Daolord realm within the Origin realm.

In summary, the Origin realm was the private property of some race known as Henali. Though they were owners, their interference within the realm was mostly limited, and the races of the realm were allowed to propagate and spread according to the natural order of things.

There were very few crimes they actually policed, such as mass extinction for colonial purposes, and for the most part did not care about who did what. They were in contact with most races or organizations that reached a certain level, and provided protection against these Fuegan invaders should their threat cross a certain threshold.

Lex finally leaned back and considered his next actions carefully. He only had 4 days to decide.

Before that, though, he turned his attention to the wooden chest and swiped it with his letter opener. Much like the other items left behind by the Henali representatives, the treasure chest unfurled itself, revealing some kind of mechanical orb.

Lex had only just wondered what the orb was, and was thinking of scanning it, when the system spoke.

New Notification: Upgradable material found! Should the system upgrade for free? Upgrade details: provide the Inn access to the Henali portal for free permanently! Using the portal from the Inn will keep the location and all other user data hidden unless specifically otherwise stated. The portal cannot be used to track or locate the Inn.

Lex raised an eyebrow, and then laughed when he understood what happened. He had been given the interstellar equivalent of an internet router. He had heard of the Henali portal before, and had planned on checking it out on his travels, but never got the opportunity, and now, the opportunity had presented itself to him.

He did not hesitate and selected the upgrade, causing the mechanical orb in front of him to vanish. Unlike most upgrades to the Inn, this one was not instantaneous, which was convenient for Lex could catch up on his other tasks.

As it happened, an entire day had passed, and Velma had appeared again, this time with another binder. Lex rubbed his forehead as he wrapped his head around the fact that an entire day had passed. He had been so busy that he had not noticed the time at all.

Still, Lex made time for her since her last briefing had turned out to contain so much valuable information.

This binder was on Nibiru, and all the changes that had been happening to the planet. In a unique phenomenon that no one fully understood, the planet had actually increased in size. The sloth known as Golden Hair that was supposedly supposed to look after the planet had once again disappeared, leaving the world to descend into chaos.

Since so many beats were undergoing mutations and gaining sudden strength, not everyone was as convinced of their roles, and everyone kept challenging the order of things. The entire planet had descended into chaos more or less after that.

There were a few beasts in particular that had gained great fame during this period, one of which was Havval El'Yun, a serpent who had proclaimed all the sea's of Nibiru as his own territory. There was vehement opposition, but none were able to stop his rapid ascent.

Moreover, a large number of humans had revolted after gaining unique bloodlines of their own. Not to mention Tiffany, the girl Lex had met back on that planet, had been spreading cultivation techniques for humans across the globe with her own efforts.

In fact, Tiffany was being heralded as the new leader of humans on the planet, and a number of beasts wanted to pursue her, but none were able to capture or kill her.

As if that was not enough, there had been official meetings between high-ranking members of the Jotun Empire and several beasts on Nibiru. The Empire had shown extreme interest in reports of mermaids on the planet.

Unfortunately, while there seemed to be some proof of their prior existence, no one was able to find a living mermaid.

Regardless, the Empire put up several rewards for the location of a mermaid, though they were very careful to also specify that they did not want the mermaid harmed even in the slightest!

Just as Lex was pondering over why the Empire valued mermaids so much, Velma elaborated.

Apparently, mermaids could transform into humans. Though that wasn't relevant. What was more important was that a child of a human and a mermaid would always be human, but sometimes with the bloodline of the mermaid. The details were unclear even to her, but she was able to gather that the Empire was unbelievably attracted to a certain bloodline ability owned by mermaids, but in all the galaxies that the Empire controlled, they had never been able to locate it.

Still, they were determined to get their hands on it one way or another.

Lex listened with great interest as he expanded his understanding of the universe, even if it was only one planet at a time for now.

Once he was done, Lex took the binder with information on Earth from her and, after a long time, appeared at the Inn as Lex Williams. It was time to meet some old friends.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 394: Personal

From the moment Lex decided to use his original identity to when he teleported and walked all the way to where Marlo's wife, Sophia was, he had already gotten several notifications from Mary about tasks that needed to be handled by him.

It may have seemed like the Inn had been functioning fine in his absence, but the truth was they were barely holding things together. It was a ship at voyage having its leaks repaired using duck tape.

An undeniable truth, unfortunately, was that the quality and standard of the Inn had fallen. It was not Lex's fault, for he had been doing his best to keep up the expansion of the Inn as its presence grew in the universe, but he expanded from having a few thousand guests at any given time to a few million in the span of a few months.

It was virtually impossible to keep up with the standard, especially because of Lex's cultivation level, which limited the amount of things Lex could do at any given time. An example of the high standard he had early on was the presence of unique places such as the Barbershop, Gamers den and Battle Ax.

They were more than sufficient to cater to a few hundred, possibly even a few thousand people. But with millions of guests, even if they operated at maximum capacity at all times, they still wouldn't be able to keep up with even 1% of the demand.

Due to the fact that such shops couldn't be replicated, the uniqueness of the Inn fell. Indeed, the Meditation, training, hot tub rooms etc. were good, but they were generic. Lex needed more unique attractions and features to keep up with the demand. Moreover, despite the strict control of the security team and his other employees, more and more people were beginning to misbehave at the Inn.

This was because while Lex and the rest had given demonstrations, that was a long time ago. Moreover, the people who were visiting for the first time may have not even heard of them.

These were exactly the reasons Lex had decided to temporarily not go to other planets and just focus on improving the Inn during this next upcoming period. The Henali assembly, in comparison, while still risky, would not take as long so Lex could still afford to go.

Still, while all of these were concerns, Lex was aware of them and already planned on fixing them. Sure it may take some time, but it would not be a huge loss. This was exactly why Lex could take some time to handle a few personal matters, such as the one regarding Earth.

What he did not know, however, was that an army had been silently gathering at the Inn for the past few months, completely under the radar.

When Lex visited the planet X-142, a mysterious group had begun to infiltrate it. Their purpose was unknown, though their actions suggested that they were either there to destabilize the Dmitri family, or steal from them.

The Dmitri family, a business oriented family that had bought the rights for the X-14 star system for a thousand years, had picked up on their infiltration quicker than anticipated, and had reacted more strongly than anticipated.

Many of the infiltrator teams were captured or killed. But fate is an unusual thing, for it was only a short while earlier that those planets had been connected to the Midnight Inn. The chances of one of those remaining teams encountering either a golden key or the golden gate that appears randomly were miniscule, yet that is exactly what happened.

As soon as a single member of the infiltrators figured out the nature of the Inn, he spread the word. It was so that this mysterious group, after entering the planet, began using a golden key to teleport to the Inn, and remain there until they were themselves required there.

Over time, due to the secretive nature in which they were operating, over 5000 such infiltrators had entered the Inn through various strategic points on the planet.

When the time was ready, they would return, and wreak havoc. Moreover, because they had been at the Inn for so long, they had a deep and thorough understanding of the Inn itself, and so made no attempts to create trouble.

In fact, even while at the Inn they were extremely careful in their behavior. They did not stick together, and instead split up as much as possible. They involved themselves with different events such as the Lady Cosmos and Earth Expo to fit in, and started to acquaint themselves with some of the workers and guests at the Inn to seem more authentic.

But now, for the first time since they began arriving, some of the group members were holding a secret meeting.

"Over the next few days, slowly spread the word," said a man wearing the Clark Kent glasses. "The operation will begin within one week. Everyone needs to be ready at a moment's notice."

"Yes sir," was all the reply he got, and it was all he needed. The plan was in motion now.

Oblivious to the nefarious plot being hatched with the Inn at the center of things, Lex was patiently waiting for Marlo.

The man had rented a Large house at the Inn, and practically lived here permanently. Considering it was just him, his wife and his son, spending money on a 2000 MP a night house was a little extravagant in Lex's opinion, but then again, who was he to complain?

Lex was genuinely impressed by the fact that Sophia did not seem to be bothered by his request to meet Marlo and directly called for him. After all, as a popular man, there must be many wishing to meet him, yet he was still so receptive.

The truth was that due to Marlo's newfound strength and complete disregard for social norms, most people feared even coming in front of him let alone meet him, so this was genuinely an uncommon occurrence.

When Lex finally saw him, he noticed that the former giant had finally started to regain some of the muscle on his body that made him seem more of a monster than a man. Yet currently the amount of muscle he had stacked up was still within the realm that mere mortals could understand.

"Well well well, look who has the guts to show up at my house after dropping my class," said Marlo wearing his signature mad grin. Unfortunately for him, now that his body proportions were actually normal, he looked handsome instead of crazy with that smile.

Lex simply shrugged and said, "your wife had my apartment ransacked. I didn't want to get pulled into your family drama."

Marlo, who had been fully intending on messing with Lex, froze. He had no idea about the details and turned to look towards his wife who was just filing her nails nonchalantly. She couldn't even be bothered to deny it.

"Well then lad, I'd say you did the best possible move to defend yourself by running far away," Marlo said with an approving nod. He sat down opposite Lex and made himself comfortable. His old butler from back in his apartment in New York appeared from a different room and began laying down snacks and refreshments.

"As much as I'd like to sit here and reminisce about the good old days, I'm here on some serious business."

Lex put the binder on the table in front of Marlo and said, "You can treat this as a request, or a favor. Or maybe if there's something you need, I can help you get it done, but I need your help to get this binder in the hands of the woman named Fernanda."

Marlo raised an eyebrow in curiosity. He recalled Lex clearly because he had been ordered by his step family to keep close tabs on him nearly a year ago. In fact, it was through Lex that Marlo first learned of the Midnight Inn, and gained his opportunity to improve his life. He not only had a good impression of him, but he was also quite intrigued by him. There was clearly more than met the eye about him, so now that he directly referenced Fernanda so straightforwardly, without making any roundabout excuse of why he even knew that name, he was even more intrigued by what was in the binder.

Without saying anything, Marlo picked up the binder and began perusing. At first he was nonchalant about it, but only a few minutes later his wide grin dropped and he became utterly serious.

The story about a hidden hand manipulating all the conflicts on Earth would have been too far fetched for Marlo to believe just a year ago, but now he doubted nothing. A few moments later, a tinge of red

entered his eyes as he read about a certain conflict - to be precise, the one in which he had to sacrifice his golden core, and lost a majority of his comrades.

That too had been a part of a worldwide chess game between the 'prisoners' being held on Earth. If before he had only been intrigued in hearing what Lex was saying, now he was suddenly greatly invested. After all, it had just become personal.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 395: Professional gossiper

"Is this all real?" Marlo asked the question that seemed obvious.

"Yes," said Lex, his expression extremely serious. "Moreover, their backgrounds out in the universe are not simple at all, otherwise they would not be kept prisoner like this on a planet like Earth that has lacking spirit energy. Other than constricting their cultivation, they're essentially free, which is probably where the oversight occurred, allowing these people to treat Earth as they wished."

"Heh," Marlo said with a half smirk, looking at Lex with amusement in his eyes. "Are you explaining that to prevent me from taking any action myself? You know lad, I've been alive for a minute or two. I've lost good friends, and I've lost the opportunity to kill longstanding enemies. Regardless of whoever they may be out in the universe, here on Earth they'll be my b*tches!"

Lex shrugged and said, "as long as these people stop creating problems for Earth it's good enough for me, but at least if you give it to Fernanda it'll be a good way of gauging her reaction. I'm not used to Earth suddenly having an owner, but if it has one it's best to at least understand them first."

Marlo did not immediately answer as his mind churned, going over the pros and cons of various decisions. Regardless of much time he spent at the Inn, it was an essential truth that his foundation was based out of Earth. To stay at the Inn, he needed to pay, and his source of income was indubitably linked to the planet.

Moreover, after the recent Earth Expo, Earth's economy was undergoing a boom. Everything was progressing at a rapid pace, and a new space race had already begun to reach the other planets in the solar system. Others, instead, were planning for mining operations out in space, with the ultimate goal of building massive satellites and space stations around the planet.

In fact, based on the history of Earth and humanity, many expected that the rich and powerful would have all their attention focused on their own personal growth, and the weak and helpless would once again be forgotten, except when it was time to shun them.

But a mysterious organization by the name of Rose Society had appeared overnight with seemingly unlimited resources and reach, and changed the world forever! Rehabilitation centers, homes, schools, colleges, trade schools, farms and more were suddenly provided by them, and they began attracting all those that could not help themselves. In a mere three weeks, a very large portion of homelessness disappeared, for all those willing to move had been relocated, provided with excellent living conditions considering they had not asked for anything in return, and were already training them to reenter society, under the care of the society, of course.

No one knew who was behind the society, regardless of how much they tried to dig up the details, and no one understood what the society's purpose was in doing this. No one, at least no one with significant power, believed such a large organization was truly altruistic.

Regardless, all of that was irrelevant in the face of those whose very purpose it was to create chaos. If those 'prisoners' were not handled, all the progress Earth was making would only become a setup for a larger conflict later.

Despite himself, marlo ended up asking, "What do you plan on doing if you find Fernanda's reaction... lacking?"

Lex shrugged and said, "What can I even do in that case? Maybe I could kill those prisoners myself, but that would not solve the problem which is that Earth is under the ownership of a callous leader. Maybe, in that case, it would be time to consider changing who has control over the situation. I've heard good things about this Jotun Empire, maybe we could invite them to visit the planet."

Marlo did not comment on Lex's plan, and simply stated that he would deliver the binder to Fernanda. Without the copious amounts of pain he felt at every moment distracting him, Marlo was actually a very disciplined and sensible man. Unfortunately, years of being crazy under the influence of his pain had made it somewhat of a habit, and the wide grin on his face after Lex left indicated that he was about to do something crazy again.

Lex, on the other hand, had already stopped thinking about the matter. It wasn't as if he didn't care about his home planet, but rather that he had too many other tasks to deal with. But also, on some level, when he left his home behind and moved into the Inn, a part of him started treating the Inn like

his home, and Earth as just another planet the Inn was linked to. As for his family back on Earth... Lex shook his head. For a while now, he had done his best to avoid thinking about them. In fact, it was precisely after he removed his tumor that he subconsciously started avoiding thinking about them at all.

It was not very difficult, for he was swamped. There was one task, especially, that he had been thinking about for a long time. He had been searching for some race or some unique guest who had an innate advantage in this field while completely ignoring those already available and with sufficient skill for the role.

He was thinking specifically of his quest to start a news service he got back in, eh, of the quest he got back when Earth was undergoing civil war and he was desperate for news about how things were going.

He had been thinking that he needed to find someone with an innate skill or ability to collect information. Now that he thought about it, if he ever encountered someone with a newspaper system he would be perfect for the role, but there was no point in completely putting off that task until he ran into someone like that - especially when he had someone as skilled as Velma.

Her ability to gather information had genuinely surprised him, and it went far beyond the scope of general information available to the public. She was sifting through information so hidden even the upper echelon of Earth itself had been unaware, not to mention what she told him about Nibiru. Considering these were only 2 binders, he couldn't even imagine what the hundreds of other binders contained.

She was more than qualified, he just had to now give her the tools required to do the job well.

Lex teleported back to his office which he was growing incredibly fond of, and summoned Velma back. She showed up excited, with another binder in her hand, but before she could begin, Lex started speaking.

"Velma, I am genuinely impressed by your ability to collect information and have reevaluated your role at the Inn. You've been placed in upper management because of how long I've known you, and your deep understanding of the Inn, but I see now that this is not where your skills are best put to use.

"For a while, I've been interested in starting a news agency, and I think you'd be perfect to run it. What do you think? I'll give you full control of how you want to run it, and monitor your performance. Then, as your operations finally begin, I can continuously give you feedback on how you can improve."

"Yes!" she blurted out filled with immense excitement, while in her mind she could only think of one thing - the gossip column!

"Excellent," said Lex with a smile and, after a ridiculously long time, finally completed the quest by designating Velma as the head of the news service.

Quest complete!

Reward: Midnight News building!

Without hesitation, he put the Midnight News building on Main street, once again contributing to the most unique street at the Inn.

He teleported himself and Velma over to inspect the new building and check out all of its features. It was a long, rectangular building with only the ground, first and second floors. The ground floor was a public area, with dozens of counters where guests could come in to purchase specific news.

Lex went through the functions of the building in his head, and began sharing them with Velma.

The most common feature of the building was its ability to publish newspapers instantly, and have them appear throughout the Inn instantly. On the first floor, there was a records room as well, where a single copy of every newspaper ever published would be recorded for posterity.

Other than that the building had an interview room, where any lie told by the interviewee would immediately but discreetly alert the interviewer. As much as Lex was hoping, the building lacked any function to detect huge scoops, and searching for and retrieving news would completely be up to the journalists hired at the building.

There was, however, one feature that greatly excited Velma though Lex did not exactly see the charm. It was the advice column.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 396: Boulder Shrine

While Lex had told Velma that he would let her run the news service as she wished, he still inquired about what her plans were and what kind of help she needed. Despite the short duration of Velma's designation, she had already come up with an extensive plan for what she wanted to do.

While it was a news service, it was based out of the Midnight Inn so whatever news they published would be based around the Inn. In fact, she was not planning on doing a full newspaper, anyway. Velma had planned on releasing a single page newsletter once a day detailing events and incidents, as well as stories featuring prominent guests and Inn workers.

There would, naturally, be a special events section that would mention if anything significant was happening on any worlds related to the Inn. That, naturally, did not mean that she would not collect information about other worlds, just that if anyone wanted something more specific, they would need to come to the Midnight News building and purchase whatever they had available.

Obviously, Velma was not omnipotent, so it would not be possible for her to always know everything. But the more time she spent doing this, the better she would become. Besides, all the information she had on the binders could directly be added into the agency repository. But at that point, Lex realized that if all the news was spread equally, it could cause problems. After all, some information was sensitive.

In this case, he told her to divide information into two categories, and the more sensitive information was reserved only for Inn employees, such as himself or potentially others who would be interested in it. Of course, even they would have to pay though they would get a discount.

But naturally, collecting news casually and actively collecting news was different, so Velma would need help. But, contrary to what Lex expected, she did not ask for any new employees. Instead, she said she would only require the help of Anita, the pregnant lich that had become an Inn employee.

Lex didn't ask in too much detail how she planned on collecting news and information, she was clearly an expert. He did, instead, ask about what she intended for the advice column since she seemed a little too excited for that.

The advice column, as the name suggested, would be a column in the newsletter where guests at the Inn could ask for advice regarding any problem they were having, and Velma vehemently hoped they were romantic problems, and she would answer under the column heading called 'Ask Rachel'.

Anyone could submit questions through their personal holograms, and then Velma would filter through them and answer as she liked.

It seemed... very ordinary to Lex, but then again, he had a lifetime of experiences behind him while Velma was on the verge of turning one year old. Speaking of which, for a long time now, Lex had a little something planned for the Inn's as well as Velma's and Gerards first birthday, and he could finally start working on it.

Feeling quite pleased with the enthusiasm Velma was showing for her new position, Lex disappeared from the News building. He was on a roll for crossing things that had long been waiting to be done off his to do list, so naturally he wanted to keep that streak going.

The next thing he did was retrieve a small pebble from the Midnight tavern. This was no ordinary pebble, for it produced water that drastically raised Lex's strength. He was planning on submitting it into the Gift shop for a moment so he could read the system's description of it, but something unexpected happened the moment he retrieved it. He got a system notification regarding the tiny rock!

New Notification: A unique treasure worthy of being an Inn attraction has been discovered! Generating a new room to maximize use of treasure!

Unique Treasure: Dead core of a divine boulder!

Remarks: In an era older than most can remember, even the mundane was worshiped. But in this era, even something as grand as the Inn has no worshipers. Such a useless era.

New Room unlocked!

New Room: Boulder shrine!

Boulder shrine: A shrine that collects divine energy and channels it into the dead core, causing it to produce the divine essence of a boulder in abundance. Those who are not immediately poisoned to death by the divine boulder essence gain many of its divine attributes!

At first Lex was extremely impressed at what he was reading, but when he read the part about immediately being poisoned to death, he trembled! He had taken a huge risk by absorbing that water, or divine essence, as he now knew it was called. But then again, Lex was being guided by his instincts into absorbing it, so on some level, his body clearly knew it was good for him.

"Mary, is there any way to prevent this poisoning?" he asked, as he tried to look deeper into the building's specifications.

"Maybe if you upgrade it further, but at the moment, there are none. Moreover, there's no guarantee that the Recovery pod will even be able to heal such a poisoning, as the only way to be really sure is to find someone suffering from it and scan them."

"Is this really something we can add to the Inn then?" Lex asked with concern. He knew for a fact that the system judged him negatively if a guest who had not violated any rules died at the Inn.

"Hmm, since this is a building provided by the Inn in the first place, there should be no problem. We'll just have to make sure that everyone who tries to use it is aware of the risks first, and that the Inn takes no responsibility should an accident occur."

Still hesitant, Lex looked into what he needed to upgrade the room. After all, he was a rich man now, so he could surely afford to directly upgrade the Boulder Shrine a few times. Unfortunately, that was not how the room worked.

To upgrade unique rooms such as this, Lex not only needed to pay in MP, he needed to provide some unique materials as well. In the case of this room, he needed to provide material that was compatible with the dead divine boulder core, and he had no idea where he could go looking for it.

He thought for a moment, but then decided to add the shrine. He would make sure anyone who took it was adequately warned. Also, he wanted to see if the divine essence produced by the shrine could continue to help him improve his body.

He placed the shrine right next to the Inheritance lounge and teleported in before anyone else had a chance.

Instead of a room, the shrine consisted of four pillars placed in such a way that they were forming a square, connected only by leafy vines that went from the peak of each pillar to the next, drooping in the middle. The vines formed a natural curtain with only one entrance, allowing anyone to enter. In the middle of the shrine was a small bird bath, in the middle of which lay the dead core of a divine.

The difference now, though, was that while the rock barely produced any moisture previously, even after a while, the pebble sized core was already producing essence now.

It was not fast enough to quickly fill up the birdbath, but it was much faster than before. Without hesitation, Lex dipped his finger in again to check if anything happened, yet it was not to be. It seemed that this level of divine essence was no longer useful to him.

Next up, he had to think of a price for this. It was not hard if he did things normally, but Lex while Lex was thinking of what he could offer to Aegis, he realized there were truly too few incentives to be an employee when he could gain everything as a guest. So now, the prices of things, especially unique opportunities, would no longer be simple.

To use the divine essence, a guest would have to pay 10,000 MP for 10 milliliters, but at the same time, the guest also had to be at prestige level 3 minimum! This was a kind of division he could have always had, but he never bothered to do so.

Now, however, he was going to put it to use. After all, the more exclusive an item was, the more its value increased. In fact, he even changed the qualification of using the Inheritance lounge, keeping the price at 100,000 MP per attempt but setting the requirements as minimum level 4 prestige.

Of course, employees did not need to care about prestige and could use all facilities directly so long as they paid.

This may seem like the difference created was not huge, but it was. It would just take time for it to become evident. After all, the first few levels of prestige could be unlocked with money, but not the later ones.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 397: Second seed

The Inns prestige system had been unlocked for quite a while, but it remained mostly unused beyond the first level. Even then, it was mostly because the first level was free and anyone who arrived at the Inn would automatically get it.

The only benefit Prestige 1 availed was the use of special glasses with the Clark Kent effect. Anyone could put them on and hide their appearance and energy signature perfectly, allowing them to come to the Inn in perfect disguise. This was a feature all guests had, and was probably the most used feature that the Inn offered.

Then came Prestige 2. A guest had to spend 10,000 MP to unlock this level, a feat that was originally very difficult when the Prestige system was unlocked, mostly due to the fact that there was nowhere to spend the money. Now though, renting a Small Village for a single night costs 15,000 MP, which would put you well within the Prestige limit. But the only benefit this level offered was to be able to instantly teleport to the Inn once a year without the use of a golden key or door.

There were genuinely a few circumstances in which this feature may seem useful, for example if you ran out of keys or for example were in the middle of an intense fight and needed a sudden get away. But outside of those very special circumstances, the feature seemed very lacking.

After this came Prestige 3. Though the feature this level unlocked was also time sensitive, it was definitely more attractive. This level would allow the user to directly travel to a planet connected to the Inn once every 10 years. Considering that interstellar travel could take hundreds of years, especially while traveling between galaxies, the appeal of this feature was considerable.

It was somewhat unfortunate that the reach of the Inn was limited so far, but over time this would become an extremely sought after feature. But despite its attraction, it was just one feature. Considering a guest had to spend 100,000 MP to unlock this level, it was both cheap and expensive.

For anyone who needed to travel large distances in the Origin realm, it was dirt cheap. But for everyone else, it was too expensive. Moreover, traveling to another world would pose considerable risk if one were not strong enough, so why would they leave the comfort and familiarity of their home planet?

Such features, that were limited in their use cases, made it so the Privilege level was an almost forgotten feature of the Inn. But now Lex intended on increasing its uses and setting certain features as only available at certain Prestige levels.

Not only would this be an incentive for guests to spend more MP, it could increase the attractiveness of becoming an Inn employee, as they would not need Privilege to use any facility or feature.

After all, while the first 3 levels were simple to achieve, from Prestige 4 onwards, there were more and more restrictions. The 4th Prestige level itself, other than requiring guests to spend 10 million MP, required the guest to be minimum at the Nascent level cultivation, and have spent at least 1 month renting a room at the Inn. The requirements may seem simple, but they became progressively more difficult as the level went higher.

At the same time, the level of difficulty matched the subsequent perks for example, Prestige 4 which would allow guests to have a 5% discount on all Inn services, would also allow guests to use any Inn facility once while outside the Inn once every ten years.

This meant that they could use anything from the facility of the Meditation room, recovery pod, hot tub room etc. from anywhere in the universe. As Lex added more and more services, the number of facilities they could use would continue to expand. For example, now anyone who reached Prestige 4 could directly retrieve some information from the News building without having to come to the Inn and then approach the building for specific information.

Speaking of which, Lex suddenly had an idea and sent it towards Velma. Instead of dividing news into two categories, one available for public and one only for the Inn staff, she could create various levels of sensitivity and make certain information available only if the guest was at a certain Prestige level.

Yes, once Lex started thinking like this more and more ideas started coming to him. He recalled that the Sovereign Galactic turtle had charged someone for growing a plant. He had been so occupied with hiding the greenhouse, he forgot it could be used as a service.

He still would not let guests into his greenhouse, but he created a small portion of it available to the public in the forest that surrounded the greenhouse. He then decided to create a service which would allow guests to submit rare or difficult plants to grow, and the Inn would grow it for them. Or, they could also sell it directly to the Inn. Lex was interested in collecting rare plants as he wanted to develop his collection - who knew when he would encounter something useful.

According to the difficulty, the payment and Prestige level would be raised. Lex assigned the duty to the turtle, but since he was doubtful about how serious the turtle would take this job, had Mary keep an eye on him.

After assigning the tasks, Lex already moved onto other tasks. Had he continued to pay attention, he would have realized that the turtle was nowhere near the greenhouse - as usual. Instead, he was standing over the ravine which contained the Fire Temple. Its eyes contained a fanatic glow as it lowered vines into the lava pool.

Strangely, the vines were not incinerated by the heat, though, of course, they never directly came in contact with the lava. Near the peak of where the lava reached until, the vines drilled into the ravine walls and disappeared. A short while later, black crusted mushrooms began to grow, feeding off not only the heat, but the divine radiance of the Temple.

After watching its experiment succeed, the turtle carefully took out another seed. This seed was one of three Lex had given him. The first one had bloomed on its own after the Inn underwent an increase in Star levels, and became the World Seed Lotus that now resided on Lex's back.

He lowered the seed, this time even more carefully, and planted it in the ravine, as close as possible to the lava without actually touching it. At first nothing happened, but a short while later the aura of the Fire temple fluctuated as a majority of it was sucked away. But just as quickly as it vanished, it returned, for the system's control over the Inn was insurmountable, and it quickly adapted for the aura being absorbed.

A short while later, a single charred stem grew from the ravine wall, pointed towards the temple. Its growth stopped, as if it was satisfied with simply being exposed to the temple's aura, but the turtle grumbled. Clearly, this was not the result it wanted.

Back at Lex's office, he had to temporarily stop his growth of the Prestige level, for something else important attracted his attention.

Marlo had delivered the binder to Fernanda. The reason Lex knew this was because he had slipped one of his business cards inside it.

Not only was this a good way for Lex to experiment on how useful his business cards were, this allowed him to know how Fernanda would react to this information.

This was a loophole Lex discovered in the systems design. Originally he would not be aware of anything related to the card until someone channeled spirit energy into it, activating his consciousness clone. But when he sat in his office chair, his connection to the system and the Inn was deepened completely. This included, among other things, any business cards he had given out, since they were also generated by the system.

Returning to Fernanda, the strange thing was that Marlo handed the binder to a projection of Fernanda on Earth, but once the projection disappeared, the binder disappeared with her. But Lex knew that the binder reappeared on a space station somewhere where her real body was.

Lex raised an eyebrow. That was cool, he had to admit. He was watching silently and intently as she read the binder, though he could not detect any changes in her expression. Either she was used to maintaining a cold expression, or she already knew all the information she was reading.

All Lex could really do was observe the environment around the card, otherwise he would have started considering whether or not to activate the card. He really needed to see what a consciousness card felt like, but there was no way he could prompt her to find it and channel her energy into it.

After a few minutes, she closed the binder without finding the card and went away. Lex did not know if she planned on doing anything, but he would keep an eye out for any changes on Earth. If she did nothing... well, even if the Innkeeper did nothing, Lex Williams was also now a force to be reckoned with.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 398: A matter of laws

Lex waited an entire day, but Fernanda did not return, so there was no opportunity for her to find the business card. Time was running short, and he had to test out its capabilities, but it seemed like he would have to do it himself.

He could, naturally, just find a random person on any planet and have them activate the card, but he had a better idea. Time was tight so he did not sit around and teleported out of the Inn, reappearing in a familiar environment. He looked around to ensure he was alone before he turned in a particular direction and used Home Sweet Home, blasting off in a straight line.

Home Sweet Home was a technique Lex used, which was ridiculously fast in a straight line, so much so that if an ordinary person were to use it they would need to wear glasses just to keep their eyes open against the wind pressure. But now that Lex's cultivation had reached the peak of the Foundation realm, his speed had reached a whole new realm.

In fact, Lex's speed at the moment had somewhat crossed the threshold of what normal Foundation realm experts could achieve. Of course, this was because of the unique nature of the technique as well. Otherwise, without the use of any techniques, the only aspect of his body that transcended his realm was his toughness.

In fact, from the moment Lex achieved his latest boost in cultivation, the way he perceived the world changed dramatically. The human body had an inherent gauge for danger, and certain things would naturally make you hesitate. For example, an ordinary person would not approach a high ledge with a cavalier attitude or would be very careful when touching a blade.

The care or hesitation hidden behind those actions was rooted in the body's perception of the possibility of harm and its instinct to avoid it. To a large extent, all such instincts had basically vanished from Lex's day-to-day life. The only danger he perceived, if at all, was from extremely strong individuals.

He felt nothing when he looked down from high places, most sharp edges felt as dull as a boulder. He was pretty sure that even the oh so intimidating guns from back on Earth would not scare him much. In fact, if he did not feel the need to perfect his Foundation through his actions, he would have broken through to the Golden core realm. At that point, his defense would have been even stronger.

A side effect of his increased defense was a sense of security that made him more comfortable taking risks, which is exactly what he was doing now.

He was currently in X-142, and he was returning to the Infinity Emporium. He ran until he reached a small town, where he used some of the massive supply of spirit stones he had in his home at the Inn to straight out buy a hover-car from someone.

It took him quite a few hours, even at the fastest speed, to reach the Emporium, but it was completely worth it. Even the last time he came here, Lex ended up buying quite a few valuable things. In fact, it was at this moment he recalled he had an amulet or something that hid identity from cameras or something like that. He had no idea where he put it to be honest, and had forgotten it even existed right up until this moment. It seemed even cultivation could not prevent you from losing your own things.

He stepped into the familiar building, once again amazed at the fact that dozens of people entered before him, yet once inside, he arrived completely alone. The only other person in the shop was the familiar Powell Grant, standing behind the counter with a familiar smile.

For a moment, Lex could not help but wonder if the Emporium was a part of a system or something. How else could so many people enter, yet detect no difference as they all get teleported to an individual room.

It certainly did tick the box for systems by manipulating space, but honestly that was not enough to confirm his suspicion. After all, just because it was impressive did not mean it could not be achieved through other means.

"Dear customer, it's good to see you again," said the shopkeeper with a smile. He seemed to recognize Lex as if it was yesterday, and rightly he should. Lex sold him some premium information, the likes of which were not easily encountered.

"It's good to be back," Lex said, as he glanced at the items on display.

"Just in case you returned I had our catalog updated," the shopkeeper said, bringing out a book from beneath the counter. "Last time we could not provide you with truly impressive items due to the kind of sales we have on this planet normally, but now I have arranged for a premium selection that can be made available in as little as a day upon order. After all, since your last transaction boosted you to a level 8 membership status, we have to make an effort to cater to your needs. I recall during your last purchase you were interested in items with spatial properties. All such items are level 7, and usually too valuable to keep on a planet with a level 4 rating like this, but I managed to stash one here in case you ever come back."

The shopkeeper was filled with pride as he elaborated on his preparations, though Lex doubted the man expected to encounter such an amazing deal yet again. Regardless of what he thought, Lex was about to clean out his so-called premium stock.

The talk about level also gave him similar vibes as to how his system worked, as it divided guests into Prestige levels instead of membership levels. But once again, this was too arbitrary a comparison to make a judgment... yet.

"I'm glad you've made preparations this time," said Lex, his smile very sly. "Because this time I'm in search of very particular items, and I already know how I intend to pay. The burden is on you now to perform."

The shopkeeper listened with excitement. It seemed like Lex was his lucky customer.

"I have a card here, a business card. It belongs to a... mysteriously strong person - suspected to be in the Daolord realm. If anyone channels their spirit energy into it, a temporary clone of that person will be summoned that one can interact with. The person in question is known to not be very hostile or aggressive so summoning the clone should not earn you any ire. But the drawback is... the card will only remain active for the next 24 hours."

The shopkeeper was momentarily startled. The time limit of the card greatly reduced the value of the card, yet the inherent value of such a card was monumental. When he recovered, a massive grin painted his face as he opened the latch on the counter and welcomed Lex to the back. The item had to go through appraisal before any further discussions.

Lex had spent the last few months in the Crystal realm, and a lot had happened to him during that time. In fact, it was not just himself who underwent a massive change, but his system as well. But the level of his change, while massive compared to his starting line, was not enough to get him in touch with the higher levels of the universe - directly at least.

While he was in the Crystal realm, due to the natural boundary of the realms, his changes were detected by none, for there were none in that realm looking out for the kind of changes he underwent.

Once he left the Crystal realm, he went directly to the Midnight Inn, which had a Destiny level protective formation, preventing the influence of karma, destiny, scrying, prophecy and so on. Thus, once again, for better or for worse, his changes lay undetected.

The moment he landed on X-142, however, his aura resonated with the laws of the Origin realm, and like a ripple, the resonance carried out into the vast unknown.

Due to the ridiculously size of the Origin realm, one would expect that it would take a long time for the ripple to travel throughout the realm, yet this was a matter of laws. In a unit of time so infinitesimal Lex could not possibly perceive it, like a trumpet announcing the arrival of a lord, news of Lex's changes were declared in the very fabric of the realm.

What this meant... was too complicated to explain simply. The repercussions of this, however, while few, were significant.

On a planet far away, Serene Williams was sighing as she thought of her rebellious daughter. It would be so much easier if she rebelled by bringing home a boyfriend or something, but no, she had to go participate in an intergalactic war for honor and pride and a few other equally worthless things.

Before her thoughts could go deeper, though, a tremor ran through the entire planet, splintering it instantly and causing many continents to instantly collapse. In fact, had it not been for several formations that sprang to life immediately stabilizing the place, the splinter would have run directly through the planet, destroying its core and causing an explosion that would have changed this from a planet to a bunch of meteors.

"What happened?" she asked, instantly appearing beside her husband, her eyes extremely grave. Only he could have done this, but it didn't make sense. His training was going well, he should not have lost control of his strength like that.

"The mark I left on Lex's skull has vanished. He is either dead, or someone has removed the mark."

Horror filled her eyes as she visibly paled, but her husband spared no time to reassure her. Things had to be done quickly.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 399: Emporium Treasure list No. 1

The cracked planet slowly started to heal itself under the influence of various formations, but that did not mean all was well on the surface. Billions of creatures had already died due to the sudden cataclysm, while hundreds of millions more were affected by the drastic change in climate.

But fortunately, the formations that were healing the planet were treating the planet holistically, so the creatures that managed to survive the first few dangerous instants had a very large chance of surviving.

To Serene Williams and her husband, however, that did not matter at all. To begin with, this planet was a training ground for Lex's father. After all, since he restarted cultivation from the very beginning, he would have to have a host of proper enemies to face and arduous tasks to complete. Thus, this planet, which was originally in its early stage of developing life, had been artificially populated with the most dangerous predators in the universe.

In fact, there were even several beasts with impure Dragon bloodlines, and one very real dragon, all kept as prisoners on this planet as the man's grinding tools. Well, technically, the dragon was no longer a resident of the planet, for it had been killed long ago. After all, they could not afford to let it go free after imprisoning it for so long.

Individualistic though they may be, Dragons had immense pride, and if it ever got out that a dragon was kept as a prisoner for a human's training, let alone the Williams family, the entire human race may not be able to face the repercussions.

Again, none of that was a concern for both of Lex's parents at the moment. The news shared by Lex's father was the worst possible outcome. Neither of them considered the fact that anything dangerous could happen to Lex, for they had gotten a prophet to see into the future and predict the direction of Lex's life.

He predicted that so long as Lex stayed away from cultivation, and stayed away from the influence of the cultivation world at large, he would live a relatively safe life for 50 years.

Based on that information, they had made their own timeline to increase the pace of their cultivation, and accomplish a few things.

About a year ago, when they learned that Lex had begun cultivation, they feared the worst and increased the pace of things. When they began hearing news of the presence of the 'Midnight Inn' on Earth, they feared the day Lex might himself get involved in such matters. Now it seemed like that time had come.

"Get someone on Earth to locate Lex, if they can. But do it discreetly, my gut tells me he's gotten himself involved with something dangerous and I don't want to attract any attention."

"What about you?" Serene asked, her voice laced with concern. "You still haven't mastered Neelum's Slash."

The man, Lex's father, frowned for a moment, before it seemed like he made a hard decision. Standing there, the man's aura changed, and if Lex saw him now, after getting over the fact that the pot-bellied old man now had sick abs, he would recognize that he had entered the state of 'flow'. A second later, he transcended the 'flow' state and went into the 'overdrive' state Lex had recently unlocked. Then... he went beyond even that, and soon it seemed as if the world itself began to bend according to his will.

Ultimately, for the briefest of moments, he reached an even higher level that almost brought him to the threshold of causing a ripple in the fabric of the Origin realm, much in the way Lex just had. The moment did not last, however, because the very instant he achieved it, the man drew his practice sword and slashed forth.

Something seemed to click, and the single slash he had been trying to master for years became so simple it became more inherent to him than breathing. His form, his strength, his swing, his intention were all perfect.

There was no sound of the sword cutting through the air, because it was not thin air through which the sword swung, but the fabric of space itself. A straight, neat cut through space appeared before the couple, before some mysterious force seemed to stretch the cut open, revealing what looked like a ballroom.

A tall, rather handsome man stood in the hall, a glass of wine in his right hand and a book in his left. He looked up to see the couple and raised an eyebrow. This... he was not expecting.

"Father," said Lex's old man, as he stepped through the cut space, as if he was simply walking through the door. Serene followed closely behind him lest space began to heal itself, separating them.

"I was just thinking about you, my rebellious child," the handsome man said, his voice just slightly forbidding. "Would someone like to explain to me why I suddenly have a 23-year-old grandson suddenly appearing in the family tree?"

Instead of replying, Lex's father responded with another question, his voice reeking with the desire to murder.

"Would someone like to explain to me why my daughter is going off to war?"

The handsome man was startled by his son's tone until he noticed he had overlooked something incredibly obvious. His son, meaning Lex's father, had entered the family grounds holding a sword.

"Crap."

Powell Grant was grinning so widely it almost hurt his cheeks. Almost. Not only had he verified the veracity of the card, the instant he entered the card in the businesses database, someone bought it with a price so amazing Powell was looking towards a bonus several times the size of what he got for the information regarding the Bangle of Narn.

"Mr. Lex... no I mean, Sir Lex, I think you will be greatly pleased with the price we're offering for your card. Of course, if you have anything you need, feel free to mention it, and I personally guarantee that as long as it exists on the market I will get it for you."

"Why don't you tell me what you're offering first," said Lex, feeling pretty good. One would think he would get sick of earning money after all the MP he had, but not really. It always felt amazing.

"Sir Lex, I would first like to tell you that your membership rank has been raised to level 9, the highest possible rank one can achieve without meeting the owner of the Emporium himself. What that means is

that the list of items available to you none is even larger, though if you select a rank 9 item it will directly be traded for the card. If that is your wish, I can arrange it for you, but I had already created a carefully selected list of items I suspected you might like based on our previous experience together.

"First, as requested, I have created a list of spatial items that I can easily arrange for you within the next 10 hours, as well as their sizes. Next, the rarest and most sought after seeds in the galaxy, as well as the most optimal fertilizer for plants of various grades. After that, I recall you had a unique interest in preventing your identity from being exposed, so I managed to get my hands on a unique bangle that prevents long distance tracking via prophecy so long as the other person doesn't have some of your blood. Then I noticed that you were using a very old version of one of the Emporium's best seller items, the Fancy Monocle, so I procured the latest version for you: the AR contact lenses..."

The man continued elaborating on his list, but Lex was momentarily startled when he heard what he had said. The Fancy Monocle was actually a product of the Emporium? Lex always thought that it was something his own system had created.

If it wasn't, did that mean that all items he got from the system were actually... stolen goods from across the universe? Or was his earlier guess correct, and the Emporium was actually a part of another system, and that systems could somehow trade items internally or something?

Without any outward change, Lex focused on Powell and tried to use one of his new features that allowed him to scan people even outside the Inn.

Name: Powell Grant

Age: ???

Sex: ???

Cultivation Details: ???

Species: Unknown

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 0 (never been to the Inn)

Remarks: If you want to sell your soul, he can get you a good price.

Species unknown? Wasn't he human? Before Lex could continue to ponder such important questions, the shopkeeper showed him a list of items available to buy with his new and increased rank.

On the top of the list was an item that Lex could not believe he was seeing.

Emporium Treasure's list

No. 1: History wiper

In case of an untimely demise, this valuable treasure will be sure to erase any and all evidence of any actions you may want to keep hidden. A must have for adventurers, entrepreneurs, casanovas and those with questionable browsing history on the Henali portal.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 400: Marzu

After buying the History Wiper, for no reason in particular, Lex quickly went through the list. The things the shopkeeper had arranged for him were tempting, but he wanted to get a look at some of the really valuable items as well.

Unfortunately, as monumentally rare and impressive as they were, the truly high tier items had no way of helping him as they aided in the cultivation or requirements of very high level cultivators.

Either way, it did not matter much to Lex. His next focus was going to be on finishing the Foundation and beginning his journey on the Golden Core realm. As such, he would now start getting items that would help the Inn better nurture Golden Core cultivators, as well as himself personally.

The first thing he got was a spatial bangle that would allow Lex to store items within it. For example, if he had a chest full of gold in front of him, he could teleport it directly to the space within his bangle, without being burdened by its weight or having everyone see him moving it.

Cwenhild used to have such a treasure, and it made Lex supremely jealous, though he was pretty sure that the one he had now was far superior to hers. After all, it contained a space the size of 5000 cubic meters.

After that... despite how odd it felt, he got himself the upgraded version of the Fancy Monocle. For better or for worse, he had to know if they truly were the same, or were at least the same kind of technology.

Then, naturally, he bought the other bangle that would help him hide his identity. After that, he bought a couple other level 7 items that would ultimately aid his own cultivation, and his guests as well, of course.

One particularly interesting item he bought was a spirit stone vein seed. It was an item that would absorb chaotic energy from the universe and create spiritual energy in the form of spirit stones. Of course, the level of energy produced wasn't too high, and could barely suffice for Nascent level cultivators, otherwise such an incredible money-making machine would never be up for sale.

Then he bought an entire repository of techniques. His real purpose was to get various spirit techniques for himself, but there was no reason he shouldn't populate the Inn's library at the same time.

The size of the repository Lex requested was so large, in fact, that even the Emporium couldn't deliver all the books at once. After all, the amount of books that could be fit into the payment for the business card were beyond count. Furthermore, ensuring that techniques were not repeated made it even harder. Even Powell was troubled by the sheer volume of this request, and ultimately had to promise Lex regular payments every month instead of delivering all techniques to him at once.

That little maneuver made Lex a little proud, as he more or less solved his technique problem for the near future.

There was, however, one more thing Lex bought - something he had been on the lookout for many months. He bought information on the Kraven race.

He was very pleased to see that the Emporium actually had information on Kraven, until he started reading, that is.

Instead of a detailed report on their race, their culture, their strengths and weaknesses, the information was only a summary of their history in the Origin realm.

Much like they were behaving in the Crystal realm, the Kraven were a warring race. They waged continuous war throughout several galaxies and were responsible for the extinction of many races. Perhaps this trend would have continued, but in their mad desire for conquest they attacked another extremely strong and extremely vindictive race called Marzu. After being attacked once, the Marzu wiped the Kraven from the origin realm.

The matter for how they were wiped out remained a mystery to this day, because the race had not been encountered ever again in the Origin realm, even in newly encountered galaxies.

This was a huge deal, since there was a pattern of races reappearing throughout the realm. Even planets completely separated from the rest of the realm, several races reappeared, as if they had evolved as an original race of that planet specifically.

It was in the way that humans kept reappearing on various planets throughout the realm.

Yet according to the information, the Kraven had never been encountered again after that incident.

Unable to help himself, Lex looked up information on the Marzu as well. When he read about them, he was startled to learn that he had already encountered this apparently ridiculously strong race. In fact, they had once been natives of Earth as well.

The only thing was that now, on Earth, this race had gone extinct. Moreover, after studying their fossils, the name humans had given them was... Tyrannosaurus rex.

Apparently, their innate advantage in cultivation was so immense that they controlled over 100 galaxies in the realm!

That was several times the size of the Jotun Empire.

Since he failed to learn anything useful about the Kraven, he collected information on the Marzu and returned to the Inn.

There were only two and a half days left until the assembly now, and he was getting impatient to try out his business card.

Fortunately, he did not have to wait for too long.

On a massive space station, a teleportation formation powered on, revealing a square block of metal.

A mechanical arm picked up the block and put it on a conveyor belt, transporting the block across the station to what looked like the command center.

A gray skinned being that had its body merged with various machines weakly opened its yellow eyes and looked at the metal block. Though it appeared to do nothing, the metal block was sliced open, revealing a thin paper card buried in the middle.

The card looked extremely ordinary in the spaceship, surrounded by exceptionally advanced technology, yet the being knew it's worth was immeasurably greater.

With a pained expression, it channelled some of its spirit energy into the card, activating it.

Once energy was channelled into the card, it gained a life of its own and began absorbing energy from the environment on its own.

Lex, who was sitting in his office, felt a brief but sharp pinch in his mind before he suddenly realized that he felt like he had another brain.

Though still linked with his main body, somewhere out in the universe another version of himself appeared, completely able to think and behave on his own without even slightly affecting the brainpower or awareness of the Lex who sat in the Inn.

A few moments later, that 'brain' also developed a complete but ethereal body. Lex looked around and found himself in an extremely dark room. He immediately noticed that in front of him seemed to be some kind of... face buried completely in an avalanche of tubes and machines that seemed to keep it alive.

Lex did not immediately address the being, for he was busy investigating the features of his new clone. He seemed completely unable to move, and he could vaguely detect how long his clone could survive. He felt he could shorten or elongate the existence of his clone, but there was a limit to how long it could exist. At the same time, his clone seemed completely able to use all the systems features.

"Oh, your excellency, please excuse me for summoning you without your permission. I am desperate for any kind of hope, and am willing to pay any kind of price I can."

It was not the being that spoke, at least not on its own. The sound came from various speakers throughout the spaceship, as if the being had merged with the ship itself.

Lex did not respond immediately, and instead observed the being. His physical body was not present, obviously, but his instincts were still active. The being before him was much, much stronger than himself, yet it seemed unable to gauge his strength. If the clone hid his strength, that would be most convenient.

"What kind of hope are you searching for?" he finally asked.

"Your excellency, I am on the verge of death, yet my mission remains incomplete. My cultivation has regressed so far that I have no hope of breaking through, while my technology is no longer able to support my body. If you can allow me to live a while longer, you would have my eternal gratitude."

Lex raised an eyebrow, for this request really was too convenient to fulfil. After all, he had just received an upgrade to allow just such a thing.

"Would you choose to continue living, if it was only as a spirit?"

The being closed its eyes, as if it had been asked the most painful question it had ever heard, and yet it was one he needed to answer.