

## **Innkeeper 41**

### Chapter 41: Tempest

Lex lay on his bed trying to go to sleep, but his arms were in too much pain and kept him awake. He'd practiced a lot at the shooting range and his aim and accuracy improved considerably. The price, other than the actual price, was that all the muscles in his arms were incredibly sore and his joints hurt. He wanted to try and heal normally as he couldn't afford to pay in MP at the moment, especially since he had to upgrade the Recovery room for Marlo.

"Oh my beloved MP, where art thou?" Lex whispered, clearly suffering from sleep deprivation. But his drowsy musings were cut short by Mary who appeared to tell him Marlo had already completed the trial! It hadn't even been a full day!

Lex jumped out of bed and prepared himself mentally to face the giant, but when he returned to the Inn what greeted him was a very average sized, unconscious man. Other than the fact that his height had been reduced to around six feet - yes, reduced - and his massive bulging fortress of a body had changed to a toned one, and that somehow the man's appearance was younger, Marlo seemed fine. To be honest, those few changes themselves seemed so drastic that he would never have recognized him as Marlo if the system didn't tell him.

"Externally he does not seem hurt, but internally his body seems to be digesting itself. He's in a state of severe energy exhaustion, you need to put him in a Recovery Pod immediately!" said Mary, seeming alarmed.

Lex didn't waste any time and spent 1000MP to upgrade the Recovery Room and sent Marlo to the Recovery Pod, which cost him another 150MP! He was left with only 291MP, the lowest he'd ever had! But he couldn't focus on that for now, ultimately this would be worth it in the long term. After ensuring that the giant was safely put into the Recovery Pod and that it was working, Lex turned his attention to what he had gained from the Trial. The conditions for the trial were 10,000 Tier 1, 1000 Tier 2, 100 Tier 3 and 10 Tier 4 Zombie cores which Marlo had successfully submitted, but along with that the man had also submitted a Tier 5 zombie core! That was a level above Marlo's own cultivation, it was incredible. Lex wondered how he had done it.

Unfortunately, Lex could not keep the Tier 5 core, as he would need to provide Marlo with a likewise additional reward but at the moment he had nothing to give. When Marlo woke up, he would return the core to him. For now he entered the Gift Shop and placed one of each core on the shelf and priced them. Using these cores helped Body Cultivators further their cultivation without any negative effects. Tier 1 cores helped Body Tempering, and Lex priced them at 200 MP. Tier 2 helped Qi Tempering, which

he priced at 500 MP, Tier 3 helped Foundation which he priced at 1500 MP and Tier 4 helped Golden Bones which he priced at 5000 MP.

He only needed to sell a few of these and we would already be in profit. Now all he had to do was wait for more guests. There were a few keys in circulation now, not to mention the chance of random people encountering doors. Hopefully he would receive some guests soon as he could no longer afford anymore upgrades or expenses.

With that done he returned to Earth and tried to sleep, eventually succeeding. He spent the following day surfing the Bluebird portal. His arms hurt too much to practice shooting so he thought he'd acquaint himself more with the cultivation world. He made an account on Tempest, the twitter equivalent of the cultivation world, and browsed to see what was happening in the world.

The most common thing he saw was fights and tournaments between Qi Training cultivators! Most recently a family had resurged in India, claiming to be descendants of ancient Mughal Kings. After they had lost some wars that nearly drove their family to extinction they had escaped into a hidden minor realm they possessed. Minor realms were realms that existed like miniature worlds, isolated from the greater world around them. They only had a few entrances or exits, sometimes even only one, or none at all until the realm destabilized. After this family grew back in strength they returned to Earth, and since their return had sent their younger generation to participate in various Qi Training tournaments to collect resources. Over the past six months they had won every tournament they had entered, and had suddenly become a massive presence in the cultivation world.

One such member of the younger generation from the Mughal family, named Babur, was extremely active on Tempest and had a lot of popularity. But his sudden popularity had drawn a lot of negative attention, and had been challenged to a fight by a user called RussianPrincess77. When he arrived for the challenge, it turned out to be a trap and he was beaten mercilessly by Foundation realm cultivators, which had in turn fostered a lot of tension between all families that had lost something to the new Mughal family as no one can discover the identity of the attackers on their purpose. Since Babur wasn't actually killed, the authorities weren't treating the matter too seriously.

Many such dramatic incidents were taking place all over the world, and Lex found himself spending hours embroiled in the drama on Tempest. Something interesting he learnt was that although there was a lot of fighting and competition, it was rare for any cultivator to die in cities. Most deaths seemed to be in remote places or in newly discovered minor realms. The few instances where deaths occurred in cities or towns, the organizations responsible for monitoring cultivator activity took swift and serious action. Apparently, if the number of unclosed cases ever exceeds 5% of registered cases the organization would be very seriously penalized.

Lex found this slightly strange: he was all for increased security, but all these organizations seemed a little too desperate to maintain the peace on Earth, while on the Moon and Mars everyone was responsible for their own security. And who exactly would penalize an organization that failed to meet the mark? There were a lot of obvious holes in the information, but none of it mattered to Lex. He only needed to care about how to get more guests. Somehow getting a popular Tempest user as a guest might not be a bad idea. He just had to pick his target now. He followed a few celebrities so that he could stay up to date on what was happening. While he was randomly surfing, he found a Tempest account that he found shocking. It was the account for the owner of Fight Fortress, who turned out to be the wife of...

"Marlo is awake," Mary said, appearing before him. "I think he broke his brain, he's just been laughing since he woke up."

"No no, that's how you know he's still normal," replied Lex as he closed the portal and prepared to meet his first ever trial taker.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 42: Alexander the great

Alexander sat quietly in a boardroom, contemplating morosely the events that had occurred this past week. They were very unexpected, and greatly influenced his mood. He was a 17 year old handsome young man, but his eyes and posture dictated power and composure uncommon among his peers. His life experiences were extremely unusual, to the point where he thought it was unlikely anyone had ever been through what he had. Born heir to one of the most, if not the most, powerful family in all the solar system he had been groomed from birth to be the best. A team of over 300 psychologists, biologists, cultivators, philosophers, historians and many more were brought together to design the most perfect upbringing to make him the most capable human to have ever lived.

The plan had begun long before he was even conceived. Both his parents were brought to their optimal physical health before they conceived, and his mother was nourished and nurtured by the best spiritual herbs and medicine known to man while she carried him. His first five years he underwent training as well as observation, but not strictly. He was allowed to explore and grow as a normal child, but certain habits of hard work and thirst for excellence were nurtured. After he was five was when his real training began.

The training was extremely careful, they did not want to influence his personality to become something specific, but while his interests and pursuits were in his own control he had to be taught certain skills

and ways of thinking. He was made to face failure, again and again, in every field, and taught not to give up just because he failed. But that also did not mean he had to try and succeed endlessly like an idiot stuck on something. After each failure or success he had to analyze and understand what had happened, and determine the best path to either try again or grow in a different direction.

At seven years his training became more strict and he had fewer freedoms. It was also the first time he was made to kill an animal. It was a sedated animal, and he had been taught the best and most effective way to kill it. He was left in a room with the animal unsupervised, and was told he could leave once he had done it. The room was not locked, and to be honest he did not feel too much pressure as he had always known it was coming. But he felt an unusual reluctance, one he could never fully understand. It was like he knew once he took this step, he would forever be on a path he could never return from. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate too long. He did the deed and left, moving onto his next training. A week later he was presented with another animal and told to kill it. This time there was no hesitation. From then on every week he would kill one animal, and they would eventually stop being sedated. When he was nine years old, there was a change. He was not told to kill an animal, instead he was dropped in the habitat of a young, wild animal, and told to survive for 30 minutes. By then he had already received combat training, and he killed the animal long before his 30 minutes were over. Yet he had to stay the complete 30 minutes.

As humans could not begin cultivation until the age of 15 he did not face any spiritual beasts, but over the years he faced everything from wild dogs to ferocious bears. Eventually he reached a point in his skill and temperament that he no longer needed to kill the animals. When he would enter the habitat he would face off the animals, and more often than not the animals would recognize his strength, and bow down. When he left the habitat, the animal would still be alive, still wild and ferocious should anyone else enter but tame as a pet in front of Alexander.

In his studies he was not expected to be the best in his class and receive only A's, he was only expected to understand the material well enough to be able to use it. To test this, every year he was given a certain amount of funds and told to start a new business based on what he had learnt the previous year. This started when he was ten, and since then every single one of his ventures was a success. Some were better than others, but they were all profitable.

He was taught how to socialize, with his elders as well as peers, and from different financial strengths and cultures. He was trained in the art of recruiting followers, in determining ulterior motives, in detecting threats and signs of friendships. His training became extremely difficult once he started cultivating, both mentally and physically. At that point, almost all freedom was stripped from him. He could only follow the training routine, with the freedom of only a single choice: the freedom to quit. At any point since he had started his training at the young age of 5, he was told that he could quit whenever he wanted. If he quit he would be allowed to let go of all his training, and would be allowed to

lead a normal life. But if he quit, although his position as his parents' eldest child would remain, he would lose the status of heir.

What could the position of heir ever mean to a five year old? He would be rich even if he didn't have that status, and he would be loved with or without it, but for some reason he could never rationalize quitting. He didn't know what it meant, what it signified, or what the result would be, but it was the only expectation his family ever had from him and he would never let them down! Even when it hurt so much he secretly cried, even when he had to study alone while his peers played with one another, even when he faced death time and time again, he never quit. He lost many battles in life, lost in many ventures, lost in many of the risks he took, but among those his age he was always the best. Never, since even before the age of five, had he ever seen a peer in age as an actual challenge, those who could threaten him were older and more experienced. His peers were only ever followers or admirers, it was natural, it was a matter of fact. Until last week!

When he started cultivating almost all his freedoms were taken from him, but he was also told there complete freedom would be given to him when he fulfilled one of two conditions: either he turned 20 years of age, or he entered the Foundation realm. He could even determine whether or not to continue his training, as after that he would wield full authority over his own life. Unexpectedly to almost everyone, he had already entered the Foundation realm at 17 years old! In only 2 years of cultivating he had entered the Foundation realm, something completely unprecedented in recorded history!

But entering the Foundation realm was not easy, he needed a specific opportunity, and that opportunity lay in a minor realm in Cairo. This minor realm was special, in that it opened once a decade and was treated as a training zone by a few academies and organizations for their cultivators. It was filled with ancient ruins and various spiritual beasts, and those that entered had to find their opportunities on their own. Alexander naturally gained permission to enter the minor zone through special channels, but whether he could gain the opportunity he sought was up to his own skills.

For Alexander this was not a problem at all as he was already at peak Qi Training and was especially skilled. Events played out as he expected, and all his challengers ultimately failed, allowing him to easily find the opportunity he was looking for: a special meditation chamber left behind by an ancient, unknown civilization. Every decade it allowed one person to enter, and allowed them to breakthrough smoothly whatever realm they were in. Right before he entered the chamber, however, he was stopped by a mysterious woman.

She was wearing a mask so he could not determine her identity, but he was certain that she was younger than him! He did not spite her for stopping him, the opportunity was for whomever could grasp it, and fought her fairly for the right to enter. What he was not expecting however was to lose! It was not that her techniques were better, or her equipment, or her cultivation. He was superior to her in all

those things, but her judgment and battle effectiveness was beyond anything he had ever seen! She retaliated in ways he could not expect and was never caught off guard regardless of whatever he did. Her temperament and bearing were also extraordinary, something he had never seen in someone his age. If she was from a renown or powerful background as he was, he definitely would have heard of her, but this woman was completely unheard of!

Ultimately, he lost the fight. But before she could enter, he offered her a trade in exchange for letting him use the chamber. Once he broke through he would gain his freedom and have all the resources of his family under his control, so long term he could offer her a lot more benefits than the chamber they were competing for. After a bit of consideration, the woman asked for his contact information and then disappeared, allowing him to use the chamber.

He used the chamber and broke through, but he had no time at all to enjoy his newfound freedom and power. He was too focused on the identity of the woman who defeated him! Once he left the minor realm he used all the power at his disposal to investigate all the people who entered the realm, but could not find anything on her. It was apparent that she had snuck into the realm somehow, an incredible feat as well. The mystery around her only increased, and Alexander grew even more curious.

Finally he let out a deep sigh, and stopped thinking about it. He could only wait for her to contact him to learn more about her. Until then it was better to focus on things he could actually focus on. The first thing was to reign in his arrogance: he already thought that he treated every foe seriously, but his loss had made it evident to him that he never treated people his own age as a serious challenge and threat. This was a loophole in his mentality, and could be used against him by anyone who noticed the flaw. The second was to finally celebrate a bit. For the first time in his seventeen years he could do whatever he wanted.

"Send them in," he said over the intercom, and shortly after three teenagers burst into his room screaming!

"ALEX I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU DID IT!" shouted the first boy, who was quite a bit taller than everyone else. Looking at his incredibly skinny figure you could not tell that he was a 2nd step Qi Training cultivator! "HAHAHAHA DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I BET THAT YOU'D BREAK THROUGH BEFORE HENRY, THAT OLD GOAT? I'M GOING TO BE RICH!" The boy laughed uproariously and excitedly, as if he could see his dreams coming true.

"Oh shut up Greg!" Shouted a girl, pushing him out of the way. She had long, black hair that fell all the way to her hips, and gorgeous black eyes. She was smiling softly as she looked at Alexander in admiration and worship. "Congratulations Alex, you've worked hard." Her name was Helen and her

cultivation was the highest in the room besides Alexander, at 7th step Qi Training. Only a few weeks older than Alexander, she would be considered an unprecedented genius anywhere, but next to Alexander her brilliance was shadowed.

"We must celebrate! I've already booked us a shuttle, we can head for the moon in a couple of days! Haha, with no one to watch over us anymore we can go crazy in New Las Vegas!" The third teenager was a rather flamboyant youngman with bright red hair and an orange tattoo of a flaming bird on his neck! His cultivation was the lowest, at only 1st step Qi Training, but considering his young age he could still be considered a genius.

"Shut up Zeus, no one is going to the moon!" scolded Helen while she kicked the grinning boy directly out of the room. Her soft and gentle demeanour had vanished, and she looked angry and annoyed at the stupid boy. He only ever had dirty things on his mind, she could not allow Alexander's brilliance to be tainted by this aspiring hedonist!

"Forget them! Forget them! Update your level status on Tempest! I need proof or else that old dog will never pay his bet!" said Greg, quickly running to Alexander with his phone out. Amused, Alexander acquiesced and logged onto Tempest with his phone and used a detection talisman to check his cultivation level, which then automatically updated his level and status on Tempest.

Greg burst into another bout of laughter and quickly dialed his phone, waiting for Henry, his eldest brother, to pick up the phone.

"Helen is right, Zeus, I can't go to the moon just yet. But still, the event does call for celebration. Do you have any suggestions?"

"There's an auction tonight near Tahrir Square," said Helen, not giving the others a chance to speak. "You should go there to buy gifts for your parents and your teachers. After that, I heard that a restaurant called Cleopatra's Garden has a special dish they make from Spiritual Awakening beasts, and they have live spirit music."

"That sounds great," commented Alexander, "let's do that."

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Lex stood in front of Marlo's Recovery Pod, slightly heart broken. The man had woken up, but his recovery was ongoing. The way things were going, it seemed he would need to pay for another day of recovery for the giant, which would hurt his pockets. But he did not let that show.

Even though Marlo was awake, he was incredibly weak at the moment. Despite the recovery from a lot of his wounds, he had to use all his focus on taming his unstable bloodline, which was not a short process. So the Recovery Pod healed him while his own blood harmed him. Gradually his bloodline was stabilizing, indicating that he was heading towards the right direction, but it would take much longer than Lex had expected.

"I'm very surprised at how quickly you completed the trail. I'm even more surprised that you took down a Tier 5 zombie, you must share the story of it when you recover," said Lex praisingly.

Marlo smirked, but could not say anything.

"For now you can continue to rest. Once you've recovered, we can talk a bit. Believe me, you will be extremely satisfied with the state of your body once we're done with you."

Marlo believed what the Innkeeper told him, but for some strange reason he could not muster any excitement at the thought of his body recovering. He found his thoughts trailing back to the overwhelmingly strong woman he'd seen on the planet full of zombies. Before he fell back asleep, his last thought was that he wanted to fight her. How dare she say he was wasteful with his weapons?