

## **Innkeeper 421**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 421: Getting started

Despite its horrendous taste, Lex downed the coffee, for he needed the mental clarity it would bring. After all, this was not normal coffee but the Midnight Special Coffee brew, and had the effect of providing the drinker with 1 hour of mental clarity. Of course, that was just a blanket statement, and effects would vary depending on circumstances. In the case of Lex, it barely provided him with an extra 10 minutes at most.

Keeping that in mind, Lex directly delved into matters. He had a list of system notifications waiting for him, but they could wait. First on Lex's priority list was healing Harry, so he teleported to X-142 once again and entered the Infinity Emporium. Powell Grant greeted him once again with a big smile, but Lex had no time.

"Show me the strongest soul healing medicine you have," said Lex. "It should also be extremely gentle, so that it can be used on even weak people."

Powell, as a great salesman, immediately noticed that Lex was not in the mood for the usual banter that they enjoyed, and so immediately showed him the list. Lex was a rank 9 member of the Emporium, and though the items on sale were of all ranks, Lex didn't even bother looking below rank 7.

At such a high rank, there were only a handful of medicines, or items with healing effects, though Lex didn't care. With an impassive face, Lex said, "I'll buy them all."

Powell, who by now practically worshiped Lex as his best and favorite guest, once again broke out in a massive smile.

"Excellent choice. It will take a few days to procure all the items, but no more than a week at most. How do you intend to pay?"

"With valuable information," Lex replied hurriedly.

At this moment, there was another consideration that Lex had to take into account. He did not believe that there was ever a possibility of anyone tying him to the Inn, and especially to the identity of the Innkeeper. After all, who could track his movement across the universe? But Lex had had enough of believing in probability and luck, and decided to prepare contingencies. He had already sold a few pieces of information to Powell that should have been way beyond his level, not to mention the business card which was a matter related to Daolords.

Keeping this in mind, he knew that were anyone paying attention to him, for example the Emporium itself, he had to provide a reasonable explanation to source everything he knew and had, and let people arrive at the conclusion he wanted.

Thus, he decided that in case it became inevitable that someone should track him to the Inn, he would make use of his other identity at the Inn, Leo the owner of Gamer's Den. For that, moving forward, he could only use information which was possible for someone of his level to have. Moreover, Leo himself also needed to become more active at the Inn, so that people actually knew about him.

But keeping up that persona would cause him to lose the availability of a lot of information and items. So, while selling sensitive information, such as the identity of the owner of the person who launched the attack that shook the realm, would give him a lot of profit, he had to maintain the mentality of an employee. An Inn employee would never purposefully reveal details about the Innkeeper, so Lex must also never do the same.

But then, at the same time, he could use common information from the Inn and sell that. After all, so long as the Emporium didn't gain direct access to the Inn, they would have to rely on him for information.

When Powell led Lex into the appraisal room, Lex wasted no time and first informed him that there was a hotel in the universe offering special environments to cater to divine guests. That's about all he said, for he was still trying to gauge the level of this information, and would depend on Powell's reaction to understand how much it was worth.

His strategy paid off really well, for the man really had no concept of a poker face, and stumbled so hard he nearly fell from his chair.

"What's the name of the hotel?" he asked with a feverish energy. This information to ordinary people meant nothing, but to the right people, was worth a lot.

Yet Lex did not answer and maintained his emotionless expression.

"How much is this information worth?" he asked, without expressing if he would divulge more or not.

Powell quickly regained his composure and began negotiating with Lex, but no matter what he did, Lex never directly gave the name of the hotel. Instead, he traded other bits and pieces of information until he had sufficient information to pay for what he wanted to buy, such as the news that a group of pillagers lead by a Quash leader called Nzaar had been destroyed, the devils had lost a star system to the advance of the Jotun empire, the Iron Heart pirates had changed their profession and had become marketing managers etc.

All the information Lex sold was worth nothing to him, but he knew how much it could be worth to those with vested interests. Finding those people would be the Emporium's job, Lex only cared that one week later he would have what he needed to heal Harry.

As soon as he was done, Lex left. It was only after his departure that Powell realized they had spent only 4 minutes during the entire exchange. His casual smile and cavalier attitude quickly changed as he elevated Lex's status even more in his mind. Something was different about Lex, and whatever it was, it made him seem... more intimidating. Powell did not want to be the person who would stand in his way.

With his conscience cleared, Lex focused on the next matters. He only had a few dozen more minutes maximum before he fainted again, so he would make the most of them.

He skimmed through his system notifications, there were way too many to read in depth at the moment, and got the gist of the matter.

He had actually lost 2 points of authority because of the chaos that had been caused at the Inn, and the number of his guests who were affected. He also received a bunch of emergency quests to save the Inn, save his workers, save his guests, save his reputation...

Most of them he succeeded, but some of them he failed. Due to the valiant effort of his workers, none of the guests were actually killed, so the system's punishments were not too severe.

Yet no matter how bad his punishment had been, he had completed quite a few quests when he killed all the enemies. Moreover, as a result of his attack on the entire realm, as well as his act of making a demonstration of his enemies and burning their souls, the reputation of the Inn had been elevated so much that he regained the 2 points of authority he lost, and in fact even gained 2 more, alongside a few other rewards.

Lex did not have the time to go through them in excruciating detail, so once he confirmed that he had no impending urgent quest, he turned his attention to the rules of the Inn. There were aspects of the system he still could not control yet, such as the appearance of the golden doors randomly, yet in other areas he had great control.

Though the Inn itself was generally open for all, Lex began designing special zones that would be limited to only those with a high enough cultivation. He could not force people of different cultivations to stay away from one another, but by creating exclusive zones for each cultivation range, he would automatically entice his guests to divide themselves.

While this was not a perfect solution, his goal was to reduce the number of weak and strong cultivators mingling, so that if anything ever went wrong, the amount of collateral damage would be reduced to a minimum.

Also, while it was not a perfect solution, until he got something figured out, he would have to continue relying on external security. As such he began planning a long term event that would allow him to keep sufficient guards around for a long time. He also had to allocate a sufficient budget.

As for what the event was? He had the perfect idea. After all, the event itself didn't matter to Lex as much as the duration and security of it. He was just using another loophole in the system.

How was he supposed to know that the lame event that he was planning would set off a storm, and kick off a new hobby for all the secluded cultivators of the Origin realm?

He anticipated that it would take him only a few successful deals through the Guild room before he had enough MP to pay for security. Then he would begin his next plans.

In the last minute before he fell back asleep, he scanned the Inn one more time to check if he missed something, and found something interesting.

Aegis had finally come to the Inn to investigate, and alongside him was Roland, the young entrepreneur. More importantly, in the new Live Map function he had unlocked recently, Roland was coloured yellow, meaning he was an excellent candidate for an employee!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 422: Manipulation

The Live Map function was yet again another new function that Lex had recently gained. Its uses were many and Lex had planned to use it to its maximum capabilities, but he had been too swamped with one event after another to pay any attention to it. Even now, the only reason he paid attention to it was due to the fact that he was focused on Aegis and Roland to begin with.

Lex was curious why the map colored Roland, the young entrepreneur who sold newspapers with a gang of kids, yellow as a prospective employee rather than Aegis. But he did not have time to ponder. He felt that he would fall asleep at any moment, so he made his move.

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As an Immortal, Aegis was able to sense many more things than cultivators below his level. Even among immortals, he barely met anyone who was as talented as himself, not to mention skilled. Therefore, the moment he arrived at the Midnight Inn, he instantly knew that Lex had not lied to him. This place... it really was a different realm than his own.

He did not need to detect the subtle 'flavor' that spiritual energy had which was different from his own, nor the concentration, or any number of other things. Just the fact that the subtle pressure preventing him from reaching a higher realm had disappeared was enough.

Back in the Crystal realm, anyone who reached the realm of Earth immortal would be able to sense it. Growing one's cultivation realm after reaching the Earth Immortal realm was not only incredibly difficult because of the high realm level alone. The realm itself put some kind of pressure on all immortals, slowing their growth.

But sometimes, either through odd circumstances, or through ridiculous talent, there were a few who reached the peak of the Earth Immortal realm, and even managed to surpass it. When that happened, they would get ejected from the Earth realm forcibly. This was an incredibly rare occasion to begin with,

which is why the knowledge that the Earth immortal realm was not the end of cultivation was already firmly in the realm of hearsay, in the crystal realm at least. As for what happened after they reached that realm, and were ejected was the subject of endless speculation amongst the few who were in the know.

Due to his position, Aegis knew one of the rumors suspected to be the truth, which was that once someone surpassed the Earth Immortal realm, they were sent to another realm called the Ascension realm.

But again, the concept of realms was too vague for him to understand completely. Yet now, here he was, at the Midnight Inn in another realm. Moreover, he had even brought along the small kid from the tavern along with him.

What was the name of this realm? Could it be owned by this Inn? Would that make it the... Midnight realm?

He was lost in his thoughts as he looked around to take in the sights, when someone suddenly teleported in front of him. The man was dressed exceptionally well, and the aura he projected was one of great power and authority. Aegis got the same feeling from his father, but for some reason, he had a feeling that even his father could not match up to him.

Moreover, the man was radiating an aura of the Deeper Laws that was so intense, it almost caused him to have to close his eyes.

Unbeknownst to him, this was the aura from the hallucinations that his body had begun to absorb. Since Aegis would not be harmed by the aura, the system did not filter it out, but since Roland would not be able to handle it, the system employed its usual protective feature to protect him from suffering due to the aura.

A few thoughts ran through Aegis' mind as he quickly surmised who this might be, and had only just thought of how to react when the Innkeeper would ask him about joining, when the man looked directly past him and at Roland.

"Dear guest, allow me to introduce myself. I am the Innkeeper, the owner of this humble establishment. I hope you enjoy your stay at my Inn, and make the most of our numerous services.

"If you find the Inn agreeable, and think that you may want to pursue a future alongside us, then please make use of this key. It will allow you to take a simple trial, and if you are able to pass, you will have the honor of joining the Midnight family. Your skills and excellent attitude will be greatly appreciated here at the Midnight Inn."

Roland, who grabbed the key from the Innkeepers' hand, was looking up at the man with his mouth hung open. He was not expecting to receive a job offer, especially for a place as incredible as this. While Aegis was still able to calmly take in everything the Inn had to offer, Roland, as a young man, was much more impressionable.

But, at this moment, more shocked than Roland was Aegis. He was the one who came to the Inn to check out if he wanted to work here, but he had been completely ignored in favor of a small kid.

"Innkeeper, it is an honor to meet you, my name is..." began Aegis when he noticed Roland was too shocked to reply, but was interrupted by the Innkeeper.

"Are you wondering why I am offering the kid a job while ignoring you?" The Innkeeper, who had been smiling warmly at Roland, looked at Aegis with an uninterested and bland look.

"It's very simple. The 'kid' is exceptionally talented and motivated, making the most of every situation. He also put on an excellent display of not losing himself to despair when all hope seemed to be lost, never forgetting to keep the calm for his followers. You, on the other hand, are an overgrown child with daddy issues and a penchant for throwing tantrums. You're so oblivious to everything that isn't about yourself, you do not even see what is truly happening in your own world. I will not retract the opportunity you have received, but consider for a moment if you can provide anything other than your strength. And if it's a matter of strength, I have no shortage of people to choose from."

Lex may have sounded harsh, but he understood Aegis well enough now that he knew if he paid him too much information, or gave him too much favor, he would fall into the same category of everyone who worshiped him for his talent all his life. Instead, by challenging him and belittling his existence to nothing more than hired muscle, he challenged Aegis to prove him wrong.

It may seem a little cold-hearted to manipulate someone so directly like that, and think so little of them, but with his hallucinations returning, Lex could not be his kind and warmhearted self. He was barely

keeping his sanity, he could not distract himself with thoughts like empathy. In fact, before Aegis had a chance to respond, the Innkeeper disappeared.

In truth, he had returned to his Recovery pod, but to Aegis, it seemed like the Innkeeper truly thought too little of him. In truth, Aegis felt offended by how he had been so directly belittled, but at the same time, he was shocked by the man's aura, as well as how easily he had been able to read Aegis' thoughts. He also felt a strong inclination to prove the man wrong.

Despite becoming an immortal, he could do nothing about the fact that at the end of the day he was human, and human emotions were easily manipulated. Had this been anywhere else, Aegis would not have been so easily fooled. He was still an immortal after all. Unfortunately, how could he challenge Lex, right in the Midnight Inn? None of his senses worked properly on him.

The two of them spent a couple of days at the Inn, taking in everything the Inn had to offer. Amazed by the magical land, Roland was unable to stop himself from crushing the platinum key and starting his trial. Besides, he had nothing left for himself at the Crystal realm anyway.

Aegis, on the other hand, returned to the Crystal realm. Whether he accepted the job or not, he would prove that he was not worthless by having Zagan use the platinum key! But at the same time, the Innkeeper's remark about how he was oblivious to the truth of his own world struck him hard. He was not stupid, he knew his father was keeping secrets from him, he just never cared. But what if it was not just his father, but all the races?

He recalled that Lex had also asked him some questions relating to the Kraven. He never cared before, but he had to prove to himself that he wasn't worthless. If he was ignorant before it was because he didn't care, but now that he cared, he would definitely find out.

Unbeknownst to him, even this action of his was playing right into Lex's hands.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 423: Lonely at the top[Bonus chapter]

Lex had once again fallen asleep, and this time the Lotus was having a little more trouble helping him lay the necessary foundation for his body. The Lotus itself was an infant, after all, and the more it raised Lex's foundation, the harder it became to further improve it.

Last time it had to ask the turtle for some extremely fertile soil, while this time the Lotus used up all the Divine Essence that had been collected by the Divine boulder core - the core being the small pebble that Lex had found back in the Crystal realm that greatly increased his strength.

Lex always assumed that the essence could no longer assist him, but the essence was literally something used by divine beings. How could it be so straightforward? The reason why Lex could no longer gain benefits from it was that he had tempered all his skin with it, strengthening it while also making it non-permeable to the essence.

The reason for that was... to prevent any essence inside his body from leaking out! Ergo, the next natural step was to have the inside of his body washed in the essence. Lex was naturally incapable of doing that, since at most he could drink it. The Lotus, however, could wash every inch of Lex's body, not only strengthening his Foundation, but also increasing the strength of his body.

The gist of it was... it was taking a lot longer to help Lex wake up this time compared to the last couple of times.

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The physical universe, or rather the physical Origin realm, was a vast and wonderful place. The possibilities were endless, and it was filled with strange and mesmerizing visages. Yet only the lucky or the worthy ever had a chance to bear witness to it. Fortunately, there was another place where even the mundane could experience the full glory of everything the physical plane had to offer.

This mystical place was known as the Henali portal. All one needed to do was scan their body and then use any of the VR immersion devices to enter the portal with their mind, and live in the alternate reality, which was the Henali portal.

The size of the portal was incalculable, for no one had ever discovered the borders of this place.

Unlike the physical place, which existed as planets, star systems and galaxies, the portal existed only as one continuous plane. Each galaxy that was connected to the Henali portal would receive a plot of land proportional to the size of their galaxy, where they would hold their sovereignty. If the galaxy had an owner, for example, the Jotun Empire, then anyone entering the virtual plot of land would require an online visa.

The visa thing sucked, but that was veering off into the political side of the portal. Basically, the portal was massive, and in fact, the definition of the 'known universe' that was commonly used in the Origin realm referred to the area of the realm which had been connected by the portal.

Other races could only explore how vast the Origin realm was by the number of connected galaxies. Besides them, only the Henali truly knew how expansive the origin realm was, but they could not be bothered to lay out the portal themselves, so they had members of the alliance doing it.

Predictably, one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the portal was fighting. Since the fighters would not really die in real life, many people used the ultra-realism of the portal to hone their skills and contest against strong opponents.

In one such place, in an unnamed galaxy, in a private room, a Marzu, also known as T-rex, a Bunair, a race of sentient beetles, and an Oolin, a humanoid race with bronze colored skin and majestic antlers, were sitting together.

All three females were spectating a battle royale and casually chatting amongst one another. This, for them, was a very common get together. Though it may seem like they were rich and carefree, in truth, they were all battle maniacs who happened to become friends from battling one another in the portal. Every so often they would take a break and rest like this, for maintaining peak mental state required some off time.

The Oolin, a young girl of only 91 years of age, was casually sifting through the pages of an online battle magazine when a particular article caught her interest.

To be more specific, it was the image above the article that caused her interest. It was the silhouette of a man dressed smartly, holding naught but a butter knife. The lands before him were filled with bodies of what she could only assume were his defeated opponents, though the outline of his face did not seem to be looking down at them. Instead, it was looking upwards, as if challenging the heavens.

Though it was only a picture, and the young girl could not even determine the warrior's expression, let alone his identity, something about the way he stood filled her heart with admiration, as well as worship.

The title of the article was 'To die at his hands is the ultimate mercy' and was written by a 'Rachel'.

The Oolin girl could not move her gaze away from the heroic figure in the picture, as if his silhouette contained everything she had ever dreamed of. Unbeknownst to herself, the bronze skinned girl began to blush.

At this point, her two friends noticed something was going on, but she herself did not notice. She finally pruned her eyes from the picture, and began to read the words written below.

'How lonely is it at the top?' the author asked in her first sentence, and then continued. 'It is a question we will never be able to answer, for that is the place where he stands, alone, protecting everything he holds dear. But while he stands at the front to protect so many others, why must he stand alone, with no one to protect his heart?'

The Oolin girl did not even realize when the tears started flowing down her cheeks as she imagined a hero, going from one battlefield to another, his body a canvas for battle scars. But when he returns at night to rest by his campfire, he rests alone.

'I will protect your heart!' the girl wanted to scream, but she knew her voice would not reach the hero's ears, for he was surely far away, fighting to keep the universe safe.

At the end of the article, a part she had not yet reached, was a statement by the author, mentioning an upcoming comic series depicting the exploits of the noble hero known only as, 'The Innkeeper'.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 424: First Meeting

Six days after Lex returned to his Recovery pod, he finally woke up again. This time his condition was much better, and he even felt like he could manage to ignore the hallucinations without any assistance. Moreover, his body was overflowing with strength, yet at the same time, he felt completely normal. It was an unusual feeling, but he did not have the time to delve into these matters. He had to make the most of his time before he fell asleep again.

It was also because of his rush that he missed the formation of the 'Innkeeper fan club' that was holding its first ever meeting, having been formed after the small news article and comic strip that Velma launched on the Midnight Newsletter as well as the Henali portal.

He teleported to his office, once again finding Luthor standing there, coffee in hand. Yet this time, he was also holding three folders. Lex raised an eyebrow out of curiosity, but chugged his coffee before asking what they were about.

"Do you have something that requires my attention?" Lex asked, turning towards Luthor. It was only natural that with time, Luthor would bring various matters to Lex's attention. After all, as Lex's assistant, his job did not end with sending in people to Lex's office for meetings.

Though Lex was feeling much better, and could almost ignore the hallucinations, the fact of the matter was that the effects they were having on him were much deeper than just putting him in a coma. They messed with his emotions, so that even now, Lex was more or less in his neutral and cold state.

Luthor, having only glimpsed at the usual warm and friendly Innkeeper, felt the Innkeepers current attitude was a reflection of everyone's poor performance.

"There are a couple of proposals I had which I wanted to bring to show you. After spending some time at the Inn, and talking to a lot of the workers, I believe that we, the workers, are not sufficiently motivated or driven to give our best performance. After a detailed investigation into how all the workers actually perform, I came up with a list of possible solutions to increase motivation and drive up work efficiency. I also mentioned a special training program which can focus on a few workers who have proven their worth to aid in increasing their cultivation, so that they can be of greater use to the Inn."

With his interest piqued, Lex reached out and grabbed the first folder and read through the list. Despite how minimal Luthor actually made it sound, he had been incredibly thorough in his report. Each proposed change was supported with an in depth explanation for where he saw the shortcoming, and how he suspected the change could increase efficiency. Even with Lex's increased cultivation, as well as heightened efficiency due to the Overdrive state, it took him nearly an entire minute to read through it.

What impressed him most was that Luthor hadn't taken it upon himself to make judgements, but had actually talked to a lot of the workers to determine whether these mentioned improvements would actually bring about positive change in their relevant departments.

A brief example of the kinds of proposed changes would be performance based raises and promotions, result based perks, such as access to some of the Inn's services or extra holidays, an annual review of the best workers in each department, specific events or holidays focused towards the workers etc.

Furthermore, it suggested sending the workers who performed the best to a neutral cultivation institution called Ventura to aid them in raising their cultivation.

Lex had to say, if Luthor ever got a corporate job back on Earth, he'd be possibly one of the most beloved employees ever. In his cold and calculating state, Lex almost immediately approved the changes. But no matter how cold or emotionless he became, it did not erase his memories. One of the strongest feelings Lex had back when he learned that his workers were actual living people instead of autonomous robots, was that he did not want to treat them like slaves or mindless workers. Moreover, no matter how much he could possibly improve efficiency by doing these things, he could never overlook the loyalty his workers had shown him.

So, while Luthor presented a lot of good ideas, Lex could not implement them as if. Before he made a comment, though, he summoned two other workers to his room - Gerard and Velma. He had noticed that those two had contributed the most in this proposal and so wanted to include them in this talk.

Naturally, due to the limited time that Lex had, he did not wait for them to come to him themselves, but informed them to finish whatever they were doing, and then teleported them over directly.

The moment that the others entered his office, a change took place and a conference table appeared with 4 chairs. It seemed like they were about to hold the first ever meeting to discuss improvements at the Inn.

"This is a good proposal," Lex began, "and I like the initiative of locating areas that need improvements and suggesting them on your own. But while these are good ideas, they need some alterations before we can implement them.

"While getting the workers to improve efficiency is good and all, I do not want the whole purpose of their existence to become working and serving. As such, while we will create avenues for those who wish it to improve, as well as take on more responsibility, there's not going to be discrimination for those who are satisfied with their place. All added perks and services will not be limited to certain people only. After all, all the workers at the Midnight Inn are a family, and as a family, we do not discriminate, but look out for one another."

There was an imperceptible pause when Lex reached this point as thoughts of his family keeping secrets from him flashed in his mind, but Lex moved past it. Luthor had presented some good ideas here, and Lex wanted to start on them immediately - after they went through some changes, of course.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 425: Last 2 folders

Although went through the dramatic claim of having the first ever meeting to improve the Inn between Lex and key members of the Inn, the actual meeting lasted no more than 3 minutes.

The whole premise of Luthor's proposal was to have the workers improve themselves by creating a competitive environment, so that only those who had the will and dedication could rise through the ranks and get the respective rewards. While in theory this was a good thing, Lex knew for a fact that such an environment hardly ever only promoted healthy competition.

The only change Lex made to this, since he also didn't believe in just giving handouts, was that he did not set a limit to perks and services. Should any of the workers want higher pay, different positions, more holidays or anything along those lines, there was a way for them to pursue it. Luthor instead had limited quotas per annum for certain raises and services, which would have bolstered competition.

Regardless, after making a few changes, Lex directly implemented them and informed Mary of them as well, since technically she oversaw more of the Inns activities than his actual workers. He was looking forward to the day he could give her an actual physical body so she could also join the Inn and actually spend time with everyone. All Mary had told him, for now, was that once his authority was high enough he would gain that option eventually.

Once that was concluded, Lex turned to the matter of sending his workers outside the Inn to train. Once his authority was high enough to teleport people outside the Inn wherever he wished he could do this, since his workers weren't actually limited to only existing in the Inns space. Still, even if he could do this right now, he still wouldn't.

"There are some things you can't anticipate right now due to your level as well as your exposure," the Innkeeper said, looking at Luthor. He could tell that, by far, he was the most ambitious of his workers. But his experience was, ultimately, limited to the Inn and the information he was born with.

"While on the surface it seems like a good idea to send workers out to raise their cultivation, and this Ventura organization may have a reputation of being neutral, there are some things you do hoping to rely on the mercy of others. All the workers, even the seemingly ordinary ones, have unordinary talent and very powerful bloodlines they can unlock. Once or twice might be fine, but once workers start going to an external organization and they notice the trend of so many people with the exact same bloodline, it may eventually give birth to greed in their hearts.

"So, the workers can only train at the Inn. While this is slow for now, eventually the Inn will continue to improve, and the training you receive will be no less than any other establishment."

"Forgive me for being impatient," Luthor said, bowing. He suddenly felt ashamed for planning so many things on his own without gaining the Innkeepers approval first. The Innkeeper clearly had a keener insight into the machinations of the universe than himself, so relying on him would not lead him astray. Fortunately the Innkeeper had not punished him, but instead guided him on which direction to focus future suggestions.

"What are the other folders?" Lex asked.

Luthor promptly handed Lex the next one, which detailed his suggestions for things to add to the Inn, as well as a few proposed changes to the Security protocols. These Lex read a bit more thoroughly, for the idea of creating a prison, or dungeon, and then holding those who transgressed was extremely serious. It felt like a huge decision. And yet, it was not, for he had been doing it for a while already.

In his emotionless state, there was no room for false modesty. It was a simple truth that the Inn was his home, and that while he would be warm and friendly to most, to those who meant him harm Lex should not be lenient.

The inclination to not harm someone, or at least not be so harsh, was something nurtured by living in civilized society, where freedom and safety were the foundations of civilization. But while all countries touted the call of human rights and peace, one needs but to open a history book to remember the foundation for a nation where these ideals could be pedaled was built through war.

But at the same time, there was no need to be so ostentatious while doing these things. Lex approved them, but did not immediately implement them. This was simply because he did not have the MP to spare at the moment.

He asked for the last folder, but was surprised when he saw Luthor's awkward appearance. Hesitantly, the assistant handed Lex the final folder. This one was thin. In fact, it was only a single page.

It was a proposal for funeral proceedings for the workers that died. Lex's Host Attire made it so that Lex had absolute control over all his actions, small or big. So it was a conscious decision when Lex let out a sigh, and sat down on his chair.

Without making a single change to the existing plans, Lex made a single addition and approved it.

This proposal was not from Luthor, but a joint suggestion from all the workers. They did not wish to be buried at the Inn, for this was the place they cherished with all their heart. They did not want a cemetery in this place. Instead, those chose, for their fallen brothers and sisters, as well as for themselves should they die, to be cremated, and have their ashes spread across the Inn.

The only addition Lex made was a monument, simple and unassuming, found in a lost corner somewhere in the Inn, with the names of the workers who passed, and a little about them.

Suddenly, Lex felt a strange exhaustion grip his body. Then he made a decision.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 426: The long, lost Leo

Lex had been extremely focused on taking care of the Inn as much as he possibly could in the few moments of lucidity he had every time he woke up. But he had other plans as well which were just as important. One of them was bringing Leo, the owner of the Gamer's Den, back. After all, if anyone ever guessed that Lex worked at the Inn, he would use Leo to explain that identity. Now was a good time to make his comeback, and he intended to come back in spectacular fashion.

He scanned the Inn once and instantly picked on something interesting. After learning the details surrounding what was happening Lex couldn't help but be amazed. Sometimes, things just aligned up too perfectly. He teleported away.

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"I told you for the last time, I can't fight any Nascent realm cultivators," said Z in an exasperated tone. It had been days since he last watched any decent anime. It was work this, responsibility that. After all that had happened, he hadn't even had any time to rest.

As if that wasn't enough, some of the regulars at the battle arena started to come and bug him. Z had quite the reputation, and fought many battles.

But while he had a near perfect win streak, it was within limits. He could not fight Nascent soul cultivators, as he could barely fight against Golden core cultivators if he used all his strength and bloodline abilities.

Yet those regulars did not seem to care, as they kept trying to convince him. After all, it was just a little gambling. The good thing about the Inn was that the fights weren't to the death, unless stated in the beginning, so there was no farm. The Recovery pod had been good enough to heal all combat wounds so far.

"Think of it as training. Come on chap, if you only ever fight easy opponents, how will you ever grow? Even defeat can teach a valuable lesson."

"If you think it's easy, you fight them," said Z one more time. Though they were annoyingly persistent, at least they weren't insulting or blackmailing him into fighting, which is why he kept tolerating them. Otherwise, all he needed to do was tell old man Gerard they were bothering him and they would be taken care of. Security had been very strict about safety lately.

"Come now, don't be like that. Just one fight. Think about how impressive you'll look in front of all the ladies."

Z sighed and was about to respond again, when he heard a voice that he hadn't heard in a long, long time!

"Stop bothering my cute little employee. If you want someone to fight, I'll do it."

Z and the men begging him to fight all looked over to see Leo. He was dressed very casually, in a black T-shirt and blue jeans, and the expression he wore was that of a smug smile. Since he was wearing Clark

Kent guesses he was in disguise, but it only changed his appearance without changing too many details. Yet, despite how ordinary he seemed, for some reason, the feeling Z got was not casual whatsoever. Instead, he felt that right now, Leo was very, very dangerous.

The system was suppressing the aura of his laws, since no one here was an immortal and could not tolerate it without getting hurt, but the natural intimidation carried by Lex's body was allowed to flow freely.

He looked athletic, but his body was not bulging with muscles like that of body builders or, in some cases, body cultivators. Yet that did not mean that the strength of his body was not completely overwhelming.

Lex released his Foundation realm aura to show them that he wasn't too strong either. Since he scanned the Inn, he knew that there was a group of gamblers who had gathered together to try and get Z to fight a nascent realm fighter. They didn't have malicious intentions, or else the system would detect it. They were just ordinary gamblers who had been blinded by Z's endless victories, and wanted to bet big. After all, they had yet to see him fail so far, so they believed he was capable of anything. Lex decided to make use of the crowds attention to declare his return.

"Who are you?" one of the gamblers asked. Unlike Z, who was honed in battle, they did not pick up on 'Leo's' dangerous aura at all.

"Leo, I'm Z's boss, and..." he disappeared from right in front of them, and reappeared in the arena.

All the screens in the arena, as well as everywhere else in the village, turned to show Leo standing in the arena alone, his aura on full blast.

"I'll accept as many challengers as you want, Nascent realm and below. You can come at me together, but you only have 60 seconds, as I'll stop accepting challengers after that. I'll personally put up a pot of 50,000 MP. Anyone who beats me can get it."

There was an immediate ruckus, as the gamblers who had surrounded Z ran to enter the arena and place their bets! Even Z could not help but make his way to the arena. After all, someone would be needed to carry his irresponsible boss' unconscious body after the fight.

60 seconds was not a lot of time, yet the incentive of 50,000 MP was enough to cause people to run, especially when Lex was displaying his Foundation realm cultivation. Within 1 minute, over 300 contestants entered the ring, all of them in the Nascent realm, and over 10,000 people placed bets on how many seconds 'Leo' would survive the fight.

As soon as the 60 seconds was over, the fight began and the desperate contestants didn't hesitate to attack Lex. After all, based on logic, whoever struck first would be the winner to 50,000 MP!

But from start to finish, Lex did not move. Instead, below his feet, a massive array started to form. Yet because it was on the ground, no one noticed. They only watched as the first attack approached Lex, and then landed.

Immediately, it was followed by hundreds more. All the attacks landed within 1 second, and everyone stopped as they began looking around, waiting for the winner to be declared. Yet the declaration didn't come.

Instead, when the smoke cleared, they found Leo standing still, completely unharmed. This time, instead of a technique, he had used an array to defend himself. Now, he would also use an array to attack.

The sky suddenly darkened, casting a large shadow over the arena. When everyone looked up, they saw an array several times the size of the arena itself, floating up in the sky, gathering energy.

In the horrified silence that filled the arena, the sound of loud cracking woke everyone up. Lex was cracking his knuckles. He gave himself 5 minutes for this fight, before he had to get to his other tasks, so he should really stop dilly dallying.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 427: Arrays

The feeling was electric. It sent tingles down his spine and made the hair on his body stand up. The heat from 300 Nascent level cultivators bodies filled the arena air, yet Lex felt as fresh and awake as if he was breathing in crisp air up in the mountains.

It was strange because in his mind he felt devoid of emotions, as if they had been stripped of him, yet his body was humming with excitement. His heart was not racing, but he could feel that it was beating

faster than normal. Though he was standing straight, he felt his muscles loosen and tighten, as if warming up for the battle.

Adrenalin had already begun pumping through his veins, and the anticipation was heating up his body. Yet, as if completely detached from his body, he watched everything with a cool head. Today was about venting his frustrations, yes, but it was also about so much more.

It was about the return of Leo. It was about making a statement. It was about protecting his workers. And, it was about finalizing his Foundation through his actions before he could no longer suppress his breakthrough.

The thing about arrays was, they did not have a designated strength level. The amount of strength they produced was entirely up to the array made.

So then how would the strength of an array be measured? Of course, using appropriate characters to form an array affected its strength. Moreover, the characters naturally occurred in space, and directly produced results from the universe itself for simply existing, so the better, or rather, more appropriate character one used, the stronger the array would be.

Another metric to measure the strength of an array was usually the size or complexity. But this too was not always the case, for an ingenious array could provide the same feedback as a large more complex array.

All in all, there were no firm rules to declare how an array could be strengthened, and unlike formations, which had clearly marked levels to denote their strength, arrays had none.

Still, it was not hard for Lex to come up with ingenious ways to use arrays. His background in programming helped, to a degree, and his understanding of science also played a role. For example, if he was creating an array to burn something, he didn't forget to create a necessary fuel as a part of the array to keep the fire burning long after the array ran out of energy.

But, in certain ways, his deep dependence on human understanding of the universe derived from Earth restricted him and his imagination. After all, while he had a scientific background, he lacked a cultivation background.

In his current state, however, it was no longer an issue for his subconscious was playing a large role in his actions, and his subconscious was also being affected by the hallucinations.

He was only in the Foundation realm so his perception of time should not have been as good as the Nascent cultivators that surrounded him, yet practically speaking that did not seem to be the case.

The moment the match began Lex entered his Overdrive state and took note of all his enemies. There were only about 44 humans, while the rest were either beasts or from other races Lex hadn't really paid much attention to.

Their attacks would no doubt be extremely strong, and carry a bit of their element, not to mention they probably had some aspects to them Lex did not understand yet. After all, his own realm was far below them.

'Hmm, it would be much easier to just negate the attacks, or send them somewhere else rather than defending against them,' he thought.

An array started to form beneath his feet, as he casually thought about how to react. The first Nascent was forming its attacks and Lex's instincts started screaming, but he did not move.

'Maybe I should form a realm around myself...' the array around his feet grew, formed of characters Lex never even learnt. 'No, that's not a good idea.' The array shrunk back in size, the previous characters disappearing

'A direct crash is not a good idea for I'll need to create a barrier stronger than all of the attacks and the cumulative force. I know, I'll create a barrier around myself that can accept any kind of energy and use the energy to continue to exist. It should not have the ability to suck in any energy itself, or that could cause me problems instead. The activation energy should be high enough so that the ambient energy can't keep it active, and only the nascent attacks coming my way can keep it running. Yes, excellent. So long as it has 100% efficiency in absorbing all energy, I won't suffer from a single attack, but the barrier will also fade quickly once the attacks stop, so it won't become a prison for myself.'

Lex's thoughts all occurred quicker than a single instant, and the array on the ground formed at the same speed. The barrier formed just in time to absorb the first attack seamlessly. Honestly, there should

have been no explosion or loss of energy of any kind had all the attacks landed on it, yet due to the tight space and narrow target, the 300 attacks kept hitting each other and exploding prematurely.

Still, none of it mattered to Lex. His mind was already focused on the next array.

His actions would form his Foundation, or something like that - he couldn't remember. Some would argue that his actions were immense enough even if they only considered everything he achieved in the Crystal realm, let alone the fact that he decimated an entire religion from the entire realm after coming back.

The truth was, when he heard that his actions would reflect in his Foundation he decided to build it by using an array to defeat impossibly strong enemies. He was so focused on that single thing that he completely forgot... he had long surpassed it!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 428: BANG

A shadow covered the arena as an array covered the entire visible sky. The spectators' minds shut down as they tried to process what they were seeing, while the competitors were trying to absorb the fact that Lex was completely unharmed by the previous bombardment.

Lex on the other hand, was thinking of ways to endlessly increase his firepower while making his array as precise as possible.

He also had to give a large part of his focus onto the array itself as well. While the characters that formed arrays were found in the universe, making them reappear was not magic. Lex had to expend his own spiritual energy to form them, which is usually why when he formed arrays they were close to his body. After all, the shorter distance his energy had to travel before forming the characters, the less energy he would have to expend.

This over the top performance right now was necessary not because Lex wanted to be a show off, but because he wanted to take out 300 of his opponents at the same time, without killing them, and without causing the damage to spread. Those extra few requirements made the array much more complicated, but that did not seem to be an issue for him at the moment.

There was just one drawback. Since he was channeling all his spirit energy into the sky, he could use none of his techniques. So until the array was complete, he would have to survive without them.

But just because Lex's mind was unusually intune with arrays, and this was his special moment - in his mind at least - it did not mean his opponents would allow him to continue his performance unimpeded.

One of the beasts recovered from the shock and dashed towards Lex to attack him up close and personal. It did not understand what was happening and did not care. One solid hit was all it would take to end the fight.

A massive toad appeared before Lex and smashed down hard.

BANG!

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BANG!

A body flew out and crashed into a pile of corpses, but it moved instantaneously and did not take any time to rest. He couldn't. Even the briefest of moments for respite could spell the end for him, since on this galactic battlefield, Alexander Morrison was nothing more than cannon fodder.

His peak Golden Core realm strength placed him on the lower end of the spectrum on this battlefield, and he should not have been so deep behind enemy lines. But who cared about such things during war?

Through twists of fate, various coincidences, and a lot of bad luck, Alexander found himself facing death at every corner, and now it was his job to make it out alive.

Behind him, four others moved with remarkable cohesion, and supported each other to the utmost to survive the onslaught. They were Alexander's team, and he was their captain.

Oddly enough, his was the only team that hadn't suffered a single death so far, but it was not a coincidence. Alexander used every ounce of his skill, strength, technique and resources to make sure that none of them would die. Often enough, he intercepted attacks that would have killed them and suffered the damage in their stead to keep them alive.

Many assumed he was just an emotional leader, but the truth was, out here, he was so outclassed in every sense that if his team suffered even the slightest drop in strength, they would not be able to survive.

So to live, he had to keep his team alive so they could support him, and to keep them alive he had to face every danger that came their way. But it could not be helped. He was not a lucky protagonist who would get saved every time he encountered danger, nor was he the golden child of destiny. Out here, in the battlefield between humans and Fuegians, he was not even qualified to be a footsoldier. It would take his whole team to fight a single enemy.

But as he gathered his energy and dodged more attacks, the look in his eyes was not one of a wounded animal, or a desperate man. The look in his eyes was one of hunger. He was hungry to grow stronger, and not just by breaking through a higher realm. He would be the best of the best.

The six swords floating behind him aligned with his moves and attacked the enemy in front of him.

BANG!

\*\*\*\*\*

BANG!

Aegis' body smashed deep into a mountain. The armor he had been wearing had crumbled away. No it had crumbled, and then pressed into Aegis's body. But Aegis himself did not seem to notice. He gathered strength in his body, the mountain breaking around him, and pushed himself into the sky.

Surrounding him were hundreds of monsters, all of them immortals. All of them had hidden in the dark corners of the realm for millions of years to achieve the strength they had now. So why would they besiege him now? It was because of the Blue Crystal Essence in the necklace around his neck.

He brought it out to attract Zagan, but he would have to fend off waves of other monsters till Zagan arrived. But he was not afraid. They called him the strongest in his generation, but how could they not hear the insult in that statement? He was not satisfied with just his generation. He would be the strongest of all generations.

The crown prince zoomed off to punch a monster the size of Mount Everest in the face.

BANG!

\*\*\*\*\*

The competitors were not only attacking Lex, they were even fighting with each other to get a chance to land a hit on Lex. They had no cooperation or cohesion, but that only worked in Lex's favor. After all, he just had to survive long enough for his array to be completed.

It was much easier said than done, for not a single spot of his body remained uncovered in blood.

As strong as his instincts were, he was not able to avoid all attacks effortlessly. Yet that did not matter, for Regal Embrace was finally showing what it was worth. Directly or indirectly, he had suffered hundreds of attacks already in the last 4 minutes, but while he suffered numerous wounds, not a single bone in his body broke.

A cat the size of a house appeared before Lex and tried to stab him with its claws but missed. It wasn't because Lex dodged, but because Lex stopped running altogether which caused the cat to misjudge where to attack.

This could also count as dodging, but the reason it did not count as such...

He looked up at the sky with a bloody grin. The array was glowing, and it began to rumble. Thunder rumbled in the sky then, in an instant, 300 golden bolts of lightning struck down from the sky, landing on all the contestants without missing a single one.

BANG!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 429: Threat backfires

Could one quantify an attack that was powerful enough to completely and safely defeat a Nascent realm cultivator, human, beast or otherwise, without actually killing them? It had to be remembered that the rebels on Earth had to plan for decades, and resort to nuclear and hydrogen bombs to threaten merely 5 Nascent level cultivators, all of whom were stuck at the very start of that realm.

Yet now, Lex was facing 300 of them. In fact, he had taken their beating not only without dying, but without breaking a bone. Sure, the interference from the other competitors made it so none of them were really able to focus on Lex properly, but he took a beating nonetheless. Of course, the fact that the Lotus had been basically reestablishing his foundation again and again, and in the process nourishing his body, also played a significant role in his survival.

Now, as if facing such an army was already not tough enough, Lex only had arrays as a viable option to do enough damage to counter them. In theory, arrays could be endlessly powerful. Theoretically, if a Qi training cultivator were given an unlimited supply of energy, they could eventually construct an array massive and complex enough to unleash attacks far more powerful than even nuclear bombs.

Yet in practicality, it was far from so simple. The first issue was that an array had to be drawn using spiritual energy. The supply of energy in the entire array, and each individual character, needed to be steady, and it also needed a constant until the array itself was formed. Now, as if that was not enough, the theory behind the array needed to be correct, but more than that, each character had to be the absolute perfect one to corroborate its behavior according to that theory.

There were hundreds of characters for fire, and each of them behaved differently. There were hundreds for air, hundreds for water, hundreds for abstract concepts like beauty, love, hate, anger and so much more. If the purpose of the array was to fuel the fire with oxygen, you would use a different kind of character, and if the purpose of the array was to birth a single ember, a different character would be used.

The more characters were used, the more the chance of contradictions forming there were. It had to be remembered that even an array gone wrong could fuel itself from energy from the universe. More than once Lex had formed arrays that collapsed, which resulted in explosions. In fact, Lex had even used failed arrays as last minute, desperate attacks back in the Crystal realm when he faced the Kraven.

So, based on Lex's understanding of arrays, it was even possible to form an array that had the strength of a Daolord. Practically though, he would need a mind powerful enough to comprehend and calculate arrays and characters on such a level. As for his accomplishments at the moment? Even he was not fully conscious of the fact that he had no idea how he was doing these things, though he himself was ultimately generating the ideas for what kinds of arrays to use.

Lex did not have a clear understanding of how much damage needed to be dealt to defeat these opponents, so he did not think in terms of damage. First he needed his attack to be fast enough so that they cannot dodge, regardless of their cultivation or race, hence he chose lightning. But it was not traditional lightning damage that he was relying on to defeat them. No, it occurred to him that he could replicate the unconscious state if he could temporarily disconnect the soul from the spirit. As it happened, there happened to be a kind of lightning with that kind of affinity. Moreover, quite conveniently for the motif of the Inn, it was golden in color.

With a bang the lightning struck, but instead of a devastating explosion, the only thing that occurred was all the competitors collapsed on the ground. Their eyes were still open and their bodies were unhurt, but they lay on the ground as unresponsive as corpses.

There were no wild cheers from the crowd, for with this unexpected victory, almost all of them had lost some MP gambling. Only the craziest gamblers who were hoping for a miracle bet on Leo ended up winning, but even they forgot to cheer. That was because the sight was too horrifying.

In the arena stood a man, drenched in his own blood, smiling at them with pearly white teeth showing. All around him lay the bodies of his enemies.

Even when the announcer declared Leo the winner he didn't really move, and swept his gaze over the crowds until he found the few specific fellows who had been bugging Z.

"I hope you enjoyed the show," the bloody man said, his smooth voice a stark contrast to the bloody scene. "There'll be more interesting things for you to see at the Inn, there always will be. So don't go looking for my cute little workers and force him onto the stage every time. Alright? It's not polite."

There were no threats in Lex's words, and at most there was a slight admonishment. Yet the spectators didn't feel that way, especially the folks Lex had been looking at. They completely forgot that they had

lost their money. They forgot everything. The single thought in their minds was... forget Z, they had to bet on this Leo in the future!

Lex did not know what was going on through their heads as he teleported out of the arena and disappeared. He realized that people, the workers mostly, might be curious about why he could teleport in places whereas only people from the Security team should have the authority to do so.

It was not an issue he would address directly for it would be less believable that way. Instead, he would reveal things in a roundabout manner. It was time for Leo to meet Luthor.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 430: Tasks

Lex estimated how much time he had left and could roughly round it off to about another 20 minutes. This was more than the last few times combined, but at the same time, the Lotus also conveyed to it how waking Lex up was getting progressively harder.

Fortunately, according to the Lotus, Lex would need only two more treatments. The bad news was, for the last one the Lotus requested a special metal that it would need. The worse news was that, apparently, it was extremely rare.

Considering that Lex had just made 100,000MP off of the gamblers who bet against his victory, as well as another 43,000 MP during the time he was asleep, his income was going up but it might not be enough to purchase it in the Guild room.

Well it was lucky that Lex had to make a trip to the Emporium anyway, so he made a small detour before meeting Luthor.

The first batch of materials Lex had bought from the Emporium had arrived, though, unfortunately, Lex had arrived 1 day too early to receive the items necessary to heal Harry. Accepting everything in his new spatial bangle, Lex went right to business.

"I have a special request that might be slightly hard to find, I'm not entirely sure about its availability."

"If it's available in any market, we'll find it. Just tell me what you need," said Powell with his signature grin. He was practically in love with Lex by now. Lex alone had been responsible for more commissions than Powell had received in his entire career otherwise. If he had a daughter, he'd be trying to set them up.

"It's a metal called Entis Core. I need about 1 gram of it."

Powell's grin froze, and a difficult expression appeared on his face. He did not immediately reply, but checked his catalog. A few moments later he shook his head.

"This time... you've truly asked for something very difficult. In terms of ranking, it's only rank 6, you should easily have access to it. Yet in terms of demand and rarity, it is off the charts. You know, I've heard the energy cores for intergalactic ships are made out of that metal, and its rarity is one of the reasons why those ships are so rare."

"Powell," Lex said very calmly, and looked at the man directly in his eyes. "Price is not an issue right now. I need 1 gram, at the very least, and I'll take more if you can find it. But you should know, the Emporium is not the only place I'll be reaching out for this."

Lex's meaning was clear. They had a great relationship so far, and although Lex had been paid for everything, the Emporium had been the one gaining from their trades. Now it was time for them to step up.

Powell's expression turned solemn, and he nodded. That was enough for now. Lex quickly returned to the Inn, donned his Clark Kent glasses and set up a meeting with Luthor and Velma through Mary.

Both of them were surprised that they had been requested for, but it wasn't the Innkeeper who was requesting them. They could not imagine who else could have Mary act on their behalf, and they were even more surprised when they reached the private room Lex had gotten to see 'Leo'.

Velma knew who he was, but Luthor had never even heard of him. A hundred questions ran through his head, but 'Leo' was on a tight schedule so he didn't have time to let things play out slowly.

"Velma, it's great to see you! It's been a while. And you must be Luthor, I've heard things about you. Please have a seat."

"Leo, it's been a while indeed. Where have you been off to? Poor Z had to handle the Den all by himself."

"I just had a few tasks to take care of, life can be pretty busy sometimes," he replied vaguely with a smile, and turned to look towards Luthor.

"I'm sure you're wondering why I've called you here, or even, who I am. Let me just quickly introduce myself. Officially, I'm Leo, owner of the Gamer's Den on Main street. But, on the side... I also run a few miscellaneous errands for the Innkeeper now and again."

His last statement startled the two, as Leo's tone and general mystique indicated a relationship with the Innkeeper that was hidden. Why would the Innkeeper require such a thing? They did not even entertain the thought that he was lying for a second, for the Innkeeper was not one that could casually be lied about.

"But, as I said, I've been very busy lately and I can't do all the necessary tasks myself. As I hear it, you two are greatly trusted by the Innkeeper, so I thought you could help me with a couple of small things."

"What is it?" asked Luthor, speaking for the first time. Requests of the Innkeeper he took very seriously. His only reservation was why the Innkeeper didn't ask him himself.

"There's two things, and the second one will require you to work closely with each other. The first thing, and this is the greatest priority, is that Luthor, I need you to contact the Jotun Empire. Preferably, you should contact General Ragnar, or someone as close to him as possible, for he has a great relationship with the Inn. We need 1 gram of a metal called Entis Core, more if possible. If they require payment, or some kind of terms, you can directly consult Mary. Remember, this is extremely important!"

Luthor only nodded, as he suddenly came up with an explanation in his mind. Luthor and Mary had proven themselves competent, so now the Innkeeper was testing them. By not passing the instructions himself, he made it so that the two of them would have to rely on themselves instead of the Inns resources. They had to prove their worth, before they were sufficiently rewarded.

Yes, things were falling into place.

"As for the second task..."