

## **Innkeeper 43**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 43: Auction

Lex stood silently, slightly unaccustomed to how normal Marlo looked. The sleeping giant... no, the normal sized man was very pale and to be honest did not look much better despite having been in the Recovery Pod for so long. He used the Recovery room's special ability to look at his injuries.

Name: Hanson Marlo Bravi III

Age: 67

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details:

- Spirit cultivation: Golden Core (crippled)
- Body Cultivation: Golden Core Peak (unique cultivation)

Species: Human/Prime Human

Bloodline: Evolving

Remarks: Extremely unstable energy has detected coursing through his body. Please treat him like a walking volcano!

Conditions:

- Severe muscle atrophy

- Severely damaged organs (all)
- Severely Damaged Meridians (all)
- Golden Core Crippled
- Body Cultivation suppressed to Foundation realm due to injuries
- Blood extremely corrosive and volatile
- Multiple Bloodlines detected
- Skeleton Severely damaged
- Brain function compromised
- Trace tier 5 zombie mutagen
- Traces of soul corruption
- Traces of spirit corruption
- Vitality severely compromised

Report:

The primary source of the patient's injuries is the patient's own blood! The blood is forcefully being evolved by absorbing multiple superior bloodlines, which has caused severe damage throughout the

body. The long duration of the process has severely overdrawn the cultivators vitality and natural healing ability, greatly compromising the cultivators lifespan. The evolving bloodline has further tried to absorb the zombie mutagen, an irreversible process that will either result in success or death. The patient's soul and spirit are also severely damaged, a result of overdrawing the strength of the Golden Core before it was crippled.

Lex frowned, he hadn't realized that Marlo had also been infected. Furthermore, according to his status, he would either absorb it or die! He wasn't worried about Marlo becoming a zombie, if that were a possibility his status would have revealed it. What Lex was worried about was the fact that it was unlikely for him to heal completely in one, or even a few days. He thought of a solution, which was to use the Golden Ticket. He was sure he'd activate a new quest if he used it, but it had not yet been a week since he used his last one so he couldn't use it yet.

The only alternatives he had was hope for another guest, or hope Hugo left his room and bought something from the gift shop. Lex didn't like leaving things to chance so he started thinking of a good excuse to get Hugo out of his room and into the Gift shop.

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Alexander was sitting in a private room with Helen, Zeus and Greg at the auction house. His three friends were arguing amongst themselves, as they usually did, and he was working on a laptop. Although this was supposed to be a celebration, Alexander could not completely avoid some work. Naturally he had to report to his parents and elders, as well as begin preparations for a few projects he had planned. It might seem dull to others his age, but he liked the feeling of making progress.

The auction had already started a while ago, but things that could attract the attention of the few in his private room would be at the end. Other than Alexander himself, the three in his room also had powerful backgrounds. They were friends he made in Troy academy, the school he'd attended since he was young. Suffice to say, Troy academy was one of the most, if not the most, popular academy on Earth for cultivator families to send their kids to. For some it was a great opportunity to nurture their kids, but for people of Alexander's background the only purpose of attending the academy was to gain exposure and make connections with other families of strong background.

Alexander's family was based on and controlled all of Mars as well as its moons, so he was quite popular at the academy even though he never attended full-time. Zeus' family founded New Las Vegas, a city on the moon based on gambling and luxuries that would be illegal on Earth, and to be able to maintain such a city his family was not lacking in strength either. Helen was an orphan raised by a prominent family in England. There was no sugarcoating it, Helen was raised and supported for the sole purpose for alliance

by marriage which was the reason she was sent to the academy. If she could not attract someone influential herself, her family would take the matter in their own hands. Still, to be worthy of an alliance by marriage her status was not low and she had been exposed to the highest rungs of society. She didn't feel sorry for herself though, she understood that there was a price for everything she had received. Greg was from an ancient and large cultivation family, and it was impossible to say he was from anywhere specifically as his family was spread all over Earth as well as the Moon and Mars.

Still, Alexander had not befriended these few because of their statuses as someone like him did not need to do that. He sincerely felt that these three were good friends of his. But if they felt the same way about him or were close to him for his status...he didn't think about it for now.

Alexander's phone vibrated and when he checked he had received a strange text.

"6 sword slice, Meteor launch, dodge, dodge, 33 Fists of Troy, Propulsion grenade." For a second Alexander was confused until he quickly realized those were his first six moves when fighting the mysterious woman from the Minor realm. It was a message from her. A few moments later. He received another text.

"2 keys will be auctioned soon. Give me 1 and we are even."

Alexander let out an amused smile. He was impressed that she knew his location, as well as new additions to the auction list, because as far as he knew there were no keys to the list of items to be auctioned tonight. It showed her resourcefulness, but the fact that she could not get the keys herself also gave him a bit of information to speculate on. Then he received a third message, and while the smile on his face did not change, the look in his eyes became serious.

"I can handle it. Consider your task done." He replied.

He looked out at the auctioneer, but at the moment they were auctioning a painting. Alexander had no interest in it.

"Score!" Zeus suddenly yelled, looking at his phone. Suddenly he looked abashed as he realized he yelled out loud. "Ahem, excuse me. I uhh...I have something to do, I'll be right back," he said, suddenly moving towards the door.

"What's her name?" Helen asked in a ridiculing tone.

"Betty," Zeus replied without thinking, but suddenly realized his mistake. Hiding his embarrassment at getting caught, he strutted out the room as if he had nothing to hide. Helen let out a deriding snort and turned away, while Greg let out a chuckle. This was nothing new, as Zeus was always flirting and Helen was always looking down on him for it. An exchange like this had happened a million times, it was almost like a routine, but how could the small irregularities in it escape Alexander? Not only had his senses been elevated since his rise in cultivation, he had been paying attention to every action everyone in the room took even while he was working. The irregularity was not in Helen or Greg, but in Zeus who had flinched when Alexander received a text. It was a very small reaction that was suppressed almost immediately, but how could it escape Alexander Morrison?

"Helen, I have to step out for a bit. If they auction any keys while I'm gone, get all of them and charge them to the room. I'll take care of it later."

"Alright," replied Helen in a gentle tone, smiling. Of the three friends, Alexander only ever asked her to do things and that always made her proud. She completely ignored the fact that of the three friends she was the only one who was even slightly responsible so he could only ever ask her.

He stepped out of the room but Zeus had already disappeared, but Alexander could track him effortlessly. He walked calmly, as if he was in no hurry, for a couple of minutes before he found his way outside a different private room. Without any hesitation he broke the lock on the door with a piece of Spirit Tech he had and entered the sight of Zeus hurriedly setting up a formation.

When Zeus saw Alexander he froze and his eyes filled with panic, but Alexander only looked back at him calmly. Alexander entered the room and closed the door. Silence filled the room for a few minutes as the two boys stared at each other, until Zeus' look finally changed from panic to defeat.

"Of course, how could you, the great Alexander Morrison, not already know everything? Was it fun, watching us mere mortals dancing about?"

Alexander didn't reply immediately, and stared at him for a while longer. Finally, he said, "I thought we were friends."

"Friends? Do people like us have the luxury of having friends?" Zeus said, and laughed despondently. He sat down on a chair, his shoulders slumped and his body reeking of depression - a stark contrast from his earlier demeanor and energy.

"Of course, when I say people like us that does not include you, Alexander! Your family loves you and is supporting you with everything they have. Who in the solar system doesn't know the name of Alexander Morrison, the golden child of destiny? But it's people like us, Helen, Greg and I, who are treated like we were born with a golden spoon in our mouths, but is that really the truth? Who doesn't know that Helen is being raised to marry off, that despite all her efforts and achievements, they only serve as embellishments to her worth as a wife? Who doesn't know that between his 4 brothers, and 17 cousins, the only support Greg can get from his family is that of a prestigious name? Or me..." Zeus' voice trailed off.

At the moment, he did not look like a young heir to a large family and strong cultivator, he only looked like a defeated teenager who was in way over his head.

"Or me," he finally continued, "whose greatest threat is not from the enemies of my family, but from my family itself? If I ever break into the foundation realm, I'll immediately become a threat to the old geezers in my family in the Golden Core realm. They'll start considering the day I might break into the Golden Core, when they'll have to share their resources with me. The solar system is saturated with cultivators, there's too few resources to go around. There's barely enough to support the geezers in my family as it is...having to share more? They'll kill me. But I also can't not cultivate, because if I'm too weak that would harm the prestige of the family. Everything I do, I have to worry about whether I can live or not. Do you think that I have the luxury of making friends?"

Alexander looked at the person who he once thought was his friend, but there was no anger on his face. There was no pity either.

"So what is this then? After all these years, why are you taking action now?"

"What is this?" Zeus mimicked. "Don't you already know? The moment you became a Foundation realm cultivator, your family announced your status as the next head of the family. The solar system is rampant with rumors that the day you break into Golden Core your father will attempt breaking into...into the Nascent realm. One family with two Nascent realm cultivators? The solar system cannot afford such a force. If you're dead, your father will not be able to focus on his ascension, or will at least delay it. That's what those old geezers are after..."

"And what was your role in this," Alexander asked, no longer hesitating with his questions.

"I was supposed to isolate you from the outside world. The formation is set and all signals were supposed to be cut, you weren't supposed to be able to message anyone or receive any messages. But the moment you received a text message I knew I had failed."

"So you were what, trying to renew the formation?"

"What?" Zeus asked, confused, then looked at the formation he was setting up and understood the confusion. "No no, this is a mini-teleportation formation. I was escaping. I don't want to risk my life. When you received a text, I knew something was wrong. There's no way someone like you had no protection."

Alexander looked at his once friend, and after a moment took out his phone and forwarded Zeus a message.

"Read it," Alexander said.

Zeus took out his phone and when he saw the message his eyes widened in horror.

"Zeus - responsible for isolation formation. Helen - responsible for 10 poisons of Ishkbaal. Greg - host for Heart Meridian Mother Gu. They will act at different stages of the assassination attempt depending on the situation."

The text Alexander had forwarded was a small part of the third message the mysterious girl had forwarded him. In the end she had also offered to help him out if he needed, in exchange for another favor of course. Alexander had turned down her help, although he did not know about the details, but he already anticipated the assassination attempt.

"If you already knew, why are you going along with it? You're putting yourself in danger for nothing!"

"Not for nothing," Alexander said, looking the young boy in the eyes. "After all these years, I wanted to know if you were really my friends."

Alexander's words froze Zeus, and shocked him as well. Alexander was not some naïve, inexperienced young man. Zeus knew for a fact that Alexander himself had killed more people in his training than most could even imagine. A concept such as friendship should have been driven out of his mind years ago, he should have only had relationships for benefit. Of course, he would never portray himself as utilitarian, and would be generous in his actions, but he should not have associated with such childish concepts. And yet, here he was braving a threat to his life to get an answer he wanted.

"You can leave," Alexander said.

"What? You're letting me go?" Zeus was shocked! He could not believe what he was hearing!

"Treat it as a gift, in exchange for all these years of accompanying me. Since you have not directly acted against me, I can let you go. When you return, tell your father he is being used like a puppet. Killing me to affect my father, that is just a stupid fairytale. War on Earth, and even on the moon, is impossible, even though that's what the people behind you want. Even if you succeeded in killing me, there would be no war. Instead, you all would be directly massacred. Honestly, these nouveau riche don't know anything."

Zeus was still in shock, but since Alexander said he could go, Zeus did not suspect him. Under his supervision Zeus completed the formation and stood in it. Before he activated the formation, he left Alexander, the man who had once thought of him as a friend, a few words. "The 10 poisons of Ishkbaal have been injected into Helen's blood. If she does not transfer the poison to someone else soon, she will die."

With that the formation turned on and Zeus disappeared, leaving only Alexander in the room. When he heard about Helen there was a glint in Alexander's eyes, but his expression did not change. No one could tell what he was thinking.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 44: A Play

Alexander Morrison, confirmed heir of the Morrison family, the golden child of destiny, the youngest Foundation realm cultivator in the recorded history of Earth, walked back into his private booth as casually as he left. By looking at his expression no one would be able to guess he had just confronted one of his oldest friends for participating in an assassination attempt against him. You would also not be able to tell that he had casually let him leave, and continued to pretend as if he knew nothing. One must

realize that if Zeus wanted to betray Alexander, the moment he escaped he could let the other assassins know that Alexander was already aware of the planned assassination. But he didn't consider it a big deal. To be honest, even before he received a text message from the mysterious girl warning him, he already knew that there would likely be some attempt on his life today. In fact it would be more apt to say this opportunity for an assassination attempt had been specifically engineered by him and his teachers, and took years of planning.

Due to his status he was always followed by a protective entourage and his itinerary was always secret. The only foreseeable event in his life where he could potentially have lax security was during an occasion where he lowered his guard. The moment he broke through the Foundation realm and left the security of his family and academy seemed like such an opportunity. During the years leading up to his breakthrough, he 'coincidentally' mentioned in front of a few groups of people that when he broke through he would arrange for a shuffle in his protective detail because he wanted to choose his bodyguards himself rather than the ones his family gave him. He also let his friends know when he was planning on breaking through, which should have otherwise been a huge secret no one could have discovered. The reason for all this was simple: he really wanted to know who was truly loyal to him and who was only putting up a front. To be honest, knowing or not knowing didn't really matter as he fully understood the concepts of searching for benefits and competition for resources. The people he could completely trust was predetermined from birth, so whether the others in his life took the chance to participate in this assassination or not would not change that. But Alexander wanted to do it anyway. He was treating it as an experiment, as well as a learning experience. He had always treated everyone with sincerity. A part of him wanted to know if sincerity and loyalty really affected his relationships, or was the world as cutthroat as it seemed. It could be said that the outcome of this evening would greatly determine the future actions and decisions of this destiny's golden child.

"There were no keys auctioned," Helen told warmly, looking at Alexander with puppy eyes. Alexander nodded and said, "What's wrong with him?"

Greg was sitting in the corner of the room sulking. In his hand he was squeezing a stress ball, it was quite apparent that he was in a bad mood.

"Can't you guess? He tried to bid for one of the items, but lo and behold, Alissa outbid him?"

"Alissa?" Alexander repeated, surprised. That was the name of Greg's girlfriend, or ex-girlfriend. It was hard to keep track, they kept breaking up and getting back together so frequently one never knew what their status was from day to day. "What is she even doing here?"

"Who knows?" Greg answered, his annoyance apparent in his voice. "She probably couldn't live with the fact that I broke it off once and for all. She's just trying to get my attention."

"How many times have you broken up with her 'once and for all' by now? Six? Seven times?"

"Seven times," Helen confirmed, completely disregarding Greg's annoyance. "But only if you don't count when they broke up twice on the same day last Christmas."

"This is not funny!" Greg roared, giving Helen a dirty look. But unfortunately for him, neither of his friends took him seriously.

The mood in the private room was relaxed and full of banter, as one would expect from a group of teenagers. No one mentioned Zeus even as time went on, but the longer it went the more Greg squeezed his stress ball - though only Alexander seemed to notice. Finally something happened that attracted Alexander's attention. The auctioneer mentioned a last minute addition to the auction.

Alexander leaned forward and focused on stage. He was truly a bit curious as to what could attract the attention of the mysterious girl.

"Ladies and gents, you truly will not believe the treat we have for you today. Everyone here must have heard rumors of a village in Egypt inaccessible to all cultivators, even if they may be in the Body Tempering realm. The village that seems to be nothing special, but is said to be protected by the Goddess Bastet. For thousands of years, as far back as records go, this village and its residents have been left undisturbed by history. Protected from war, protected from famine, protected from any kind of tribulation, this unnamed village has passed through the annals of history as a mystery."

It was true, what the auctioneer said. Alexander had also heard about it, the village that worshiped the Goddess Bastet was one of the forbidden zones of the world that no cultivator had ever entered. Mortals, however, had found their way in and even made videos, but could not discover anything significant about the village. Any mortals who tried to harm the village however would mysteriously disappear. Although it was a forbidden zone, if no one tried to invade its territory no one would be harmed so it was considered the least threatening. Before Alexander started cultivating he had tried to look for the village himself once, but unfortunately the entrance to the village could not always be found and depended on luck.

"Well our guests would be pleased to learn that earlier today, a resident from that village sold two spirit artifacts the likes of which have never been seen! The artifacts are in the shape of a key," the auctioneer waved his hand signaling a woman who walked onto the stage holding a purple, velvet pillow. On the pillow were placed two golden keys, attracting all the eyes in the venue.

"The use for these artifacts cannot be determined yet, but when held they release a warm current of spiritual energy through the body that seem to have a healing effect. Our appraisers strongly suspect that the keys lead to an ancient, unknown heritage waiting to be discovered." The auctioneer beamed as he spoke, and waited for a moment for his audience to absorb what was said. "Both keys will be auctioned separately. We will begin the bidding at fifty million dollars as well as 5 thousand spirit stones! All bids must be at least one hundred thousand dollars and one hundred spirit stones!"

Auctions in the cultivation world were often like this. Money on its own was too useless to a cultivator, so spirit coins or spirit stones would also be used. Sometimes spirit stones would be used alone, but although money didn't help with cultivation it wasn't as if money had no value at all, which is why most often it was some combination of both.

Before anyone had a chance to consider whether to bid or not, Alexander had already placed his bid. "Five hundred million dollars, ten thousand spirit stones and one grade four Purple Spirit pill!" Everyone in the hall froze in shock!

A grade four pill was one meant for Foundation realm cultivators, and the Purple Spirit pill was a rather famous pill used to heal internal wounds quickly. It was an extremely rare pill that most people used in life or death situations, and now it was being used to pay for a key. Although the auctioneer had hyped up the key saying it could lead to a heritage, there was no proof of that, it was only a possibility. It really wasn't the kind of thing someone would gamble on, at least this much. But to Alexander this price was irrelevant. He simply wanted to quickly get the key before his conspirators began their little 'play'.

After a few moments, when no one else bid the auctioneer shouted "sold" with all his enthusiasm and started the bidding for the next key, but once again a voice rang out in the hall. "Five hundred million dollars, ten thousand spirit stones and one grade four Purple Spirit pill!"

Shock! Awe! Horror! These feelings gripped everyone in the hall, and even the auctioneer began to wonder if there were more secrets behind the keys they weren't aware of. In fact, even Helen and Greg were surprised by Alexander's brazen spending! He was not someone who carelessly wasted money, even if he had a lot of it.

"Do you know what those keys do?" Helen finally asked, her voice trembling a bit.

"No, but someone asked me to get the keys. I am just getting them for that person." Alexander's words scared the two kids in his room a bit. Who would dare use Alexander Morrison as a middleman? Could it be...the elder from his family?

Before the conversation could go any further someone knocked on Alexander's door. The young man raised an eyebrow in curiosity. The keys were still on stage with the auctioneer, so it couldn't be someone from the auction house bringing him his prize. Were his assassins about to begin their little performance?