

Innkeeper 441

The Innkeeper

Chapter 441: Upcoming festivities

There was no flashy display and nothing special happened. Lex simply got a notification saying that the Mystery trial would shut down as soon as the guest currently using it would exit, and the upgrade would take a short while.

Lex shrugged and turned his attention to the next token, the 0.5 star increase token. This fella here would be his main attraction to a festival Lex was planning. He checked his MP and saw that he had a little over 20 billion of it, so he could begin his planning.

He opened up the event panel and began creating the event. Basically, Lex was planning a big party and interesting events for a long duration of time. Although his intentions were to genuinely create this event and hoped that it would be successful, that was not his main goal.

Lex had decided that until his own workers became strong enough to guard the Inn, he would perpetually have events happening at the Inn so he could hire external security. After all, he couldn't hire security without creating an event first.

Moreover, it wasn't as if this event was destined to not be interesting. Lex's original intention was to host an event based around the Fishing Well, and have a long competition where guests tried to fish from various worlds, and even the Crystal realm. Now he had even more options. The star rank upgrade would only be one of the events of the festival, though Lex intended to focus most of his marketing on the aid that event would give to cultivation. Moreover, there was one more thing happening at the Inn he learnt from his notification: many small realms were fusing with the Inns realm. The progress had reached 96% so it would be completed soon.

Lex looked into it and learnt that the fusion would not expand the size of the original realm, but instead create a series of entrances dotted throughout the realm from which those other minor realms could be accessed. As for what was in them, that remained to be seen. Yet Lex planned to integrate those realms into his festival somehow.

He also had a giant spaceship now. He could definitely find use for that. Furthermore, even if Lex ran out of all other activities and ideas, he'd make the festival about card games, whether it was stuff like poker

or pookmonster. Since his real purpose was the security the event provided, he could be as wild with his ideas as he wanted.

He straight out spent 1 billion MP on the event, and made it 3 months long, starting one week later. Half the allocated budget was for security, while he would use the remaining half to plan the other festivities. He planned on using the star upgrade token in 2 weeks, so he'd get plenty of time to advertise for that as well.

Logically, he should have waited even longer to use it to further capitalize on any guests he could attract using the boost in cultivation, but he himself did not want to wait too long before his breakthrough, and he wanted to use the opportunity provided by the star level increase to do so.

The moment he started working on the event, ideas started flowing to him. He investigated the spaceship, and its capabilities so that he could know what he could do with it.

Unfortunately, while he had the ship, its power source had been converted into MP. If Lex wanted to use it he would have to power it with MP. Furthermore, that was only a solution inside the Inn. If he took it out, he would need a power source. In fact, while it looked like the ship was currently flying, it was in fact being kept in the air using the Inn's powers. Lex would need to spend 1 million MP a month just to have the ship fly and have its basic functions operating.

But other than mindlessly swallowing Lex's MP, the ship did many interesting things as well. It had remarkable medical facilities, though using them would be far from simple. Unlike the Inn's services, which could cater to any species, these needed to be operated manually and supplied with the appropriate supplies. Moreover, how successful a treatment would be would depend on the doctors knowledge and skill of these equipment. In summary, they seemed to be able to cater to cultivators far stronger than the one the Inns services could heal, but they required proper care instead of letting the system do the work blindly.

Other than that, the ship had phenomenal life support functions, completely self-sufficient farms and gardens, immensely powerful weapons, the ability to travel in space, the - eh, wait!

Lex's eyes gleamed! Weapons! He... he couldn't believe it! Since the ship was an item that had been processed through the system, it was providing Lex with an accurate list of all the ship's functions, and there were definitely weapons in it! The strength and capacity of those weapons was to be determined, and like the medical equipment, would require trained personnel to use them. But it was still better than nothing.

Various ideas ran through Lex's head. Using the weapons also required proper ammunition, so it wasn't as if they could be used immediately, but this would serve him well. He made a mental note to find the new spirit that had become a resident of the Inn and ask him in detail about the ship - using his Leo identity, of course.

But he could not be distracted by random thoughts, he was focusing on the festival for now. Speaking of which, he thought of the perfect use of the ship during the festival. There was a sharp gleam that ran through Lex's eyes as he compiled his plans for this upcoming event.

He would not do anything half-heartedly anymore. Even if his intentions for this event were just security, he would make sure that this would be something to remember.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 442: A moment of peace

Lex spent many hours planning out the upcoming event. As it turned out, holding a three month long festival was harder than it seemed. Many of the ideas he had could easily fit into just the first month, so not only did he need to find ways to stretch them out, he had to think up more ideas as well.

Still, he had thought up the basic structure of how things would proceed and made room to include any ideas that he had at the moment. Yet planning out everything was only the first part. He sent the preliminary schedule of events to Mary, and had her distribute it amongst the workers so that they should also know what to expect.

Moreover, a monumental task was placed before the Planning department. With them, Lex shared a more detailed version of the upcoming festivities and told them not only to design the decoration for the Party village for the event, as well as the other areas which would be included in the festival, but had them do research on other popular festivals on the Henali portal.

It could not be denied that he was heavily influenced by earth's cultures and traditions in everything he did, and he did not blame himself for that. But it was now time to make an effort to step away, not only to be more inclusive of the norms of the Origin realm, but to understand how he could cater to them better.

By the time he was done, it was already late into the night, not that had any effect on the thriving nature of the Inn. Whether the Inn was lit up by the bright, artificial sun or illuminated under the soft yellow glow of the sea of sky lanterns, the guests were constantly on the go.

Some were dining with friends, others were gambling at the colosseum, while others still were using the Inns services in ways Lex never could have imagined.

Children were waging an endless war against the bunnies at the daycare area. A Krab-man and a lonely desert farmer girl were falling in love by the lazy river. A patch of sentient grass and its older brother, a vine that extended under the entire Inn, were spying on different guests, learning about the universe. In a giant, floating sphere of water that Lex had created above the colosseum, a host of aquatic beasts were playing a game they called Blitz-sphere. It was basically underwater rugby.

It was very soothing to watch, and Lex took a few moments to enjoy it. The Inn had grown massive while he was in the Crystal realm. He had been deprived of enjoying its subtle nuances, and only now that there was no impending chaos did he take a moment to take it all in.

But, unfortunately, a moment was all he really had. He was a busy man, and the Inn wouldn't run itself. Well, actually it would, but Lex still had work to do.

"Tell me about the giant that wants to meet me," Lex said to Mary. "You didn't explain what happened."

"Not much really 'happened' per se. When the creature appeared at the Inn it was a fumbling mess. It couldn't even stand straight, and actually fell onto the spaceship before tumbling off. Qawain responded timely, preventing it from accidentally squishing some guests. Afterwards, I can only describe what it did as hyperventilating, but fortunately, Qawain calmed it down.

"Afterwards it began asking Qawain a bunch of questions, mostly because it did not understand most things. It did not know what the universe was, so when the Inn was introduced as a hotel for the universe, it was confused. So when Qawain started explaining to it what planets, star systems and galaxies were, it immediately asked if it was possible to meet the owner or creator of the Inn. It was very adamant, so far as declaring eternal servitude if the 'owner' could grant him a wish.

"I'm not sure what this wish is or what it wants, but a massive creature like that is hard to ignore. If he becomes an employee he could be very useful, at least I think so. But it really depends on what it wants.

Based on how it's been behaving, it seems like the creature is just beginning to learn how to use its body. If I had to guess, I would say it's a newborn, and if that's the case, it'll be even easier for it to get adjusted to the Inn."

Lex nodded and scanned the creature, only to receive a surprise!

Name: *&%error%&*

Age: *&%error%&*

Sex: *&%error%&*

Cultivation Details: *&%error%&*

Species: *&%error%&*

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: This guest looks like he's really hard-headed!

After a very, very long time, Lex encountered another guest with various errors showing up when it scanned them. Lex's leading suspicion was that people who had errors were actually system wielders.

If that was true, then this would be an amazing opportunity for Lex to ascertain the truth about it - if Mary's guess about it being a newborn were true. He hadn't forgotten that system wielders could steal each other's systems to strengthen their own, the way he had done. If that was the case, this could also be a trap.

But inside the Inn, Lex feared no traps, so to him, this was an important opportunity to learn the truth. If he could prove the error message was the sign of a system user, he would have finally discovered a way to discover system users.

After making sure to calm down his thoughts, Lex teleported over. His confidence did not make him overlook the fact that when Mary told him that only a system was another system's weakness, it worked both for him and against him. He was fully cognizant of the fact that anything could happen when facing a system wielder, so he entered his overdrive state before teleporting over.

While it looked like Lex was going for a simple meeting, he was going over with a mindset ready for war.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 443: Emotions

The ever constant breeze was blowing gently over and around the rocky creature. The meadow where the creature sat in meditation was far away from the populated areas of the Inn, and so was devoid of the hustle and bustle of the populace. Instead, only the sounds of nature accompanied it.

Though the creature did not technically have ears, it could hear any sound that touched its rocky body. So it was not an exaggeration to say that it listened with its entire body the sound of the rustling grass, the whisper of the wind, the flapping of birds' wings and the cooing of the many doves that sat all over its rocky body.

The creature did not have skin, yet it was very sensitive to the cool clouds that swam past its body. It did not have a nose, yet it could smell nature around in ways that it did not realize. There were other senses the creature had not had in its previous life, yet he felt them now. He felt the peace around him, felt the beauty wash him, felt life itself giving him a new chance that it had never even imagined. Yet for all the fortunes it had, how could it get over, in a single moment, all the lingering attachments of his previous life. With its eyes closed, it could remember clearly the summer days it spent in its previous life that were nowhere near as comfortable as the meadow it now inhabited. Yet it would trade this comfort in a single beat of a heart it no longer had, for the company it had kept in those days had been lost to it forever.

In this field it had seen flowers of immeasurable beauty, yet the creature only recalled a spring it had once spent in a dirty village, pretending to be a commoner alongside the princess who he was sworn to protect. Even beaten and battered by the ordeals of life, with dirt on her face and sweat on her brow, she was more beautiful than any visage the universe could offer.

What was the point of a second chance, when he was still attached to his failures in the first one? How could he satisfy the demands of the system that gave him new life, when the pain of defeat filled every fiber of his being?

Again and again, its last moments in its previous life played in its mind. The nation was at war, the enemy was close at hand, they had prepared for battle, but everything went wrong too suddenly. Lu Bu had appeared to kill the princess within the safety of her own home, the guards were all dead, chaos had erupted. The creature remembered holding off the enemies to allow the princess a chance to escape, yet a blade had run through his heart, piercing him from the back.

What had happened? Who had betrayed him? What became of the princess? For all the strength and might this new body contained, the creature suffered only through an anguished lament that it could not shed tears so that it may express some of its pain.

"I was told you wanted to meet with me. I hope this isn't a bad time."

A voice cut through the silence of the night, and with a jolt, woke the creature from its desperate thoughts.

When the creature opened its eyes, it saw a man in the air in front of its face, as if he was standing in the clouds. His voice had not startled the creature despite its suddenness, but rather, woken it up from its depression and washed it clean of the negative emotions that had a hold on it.

Seeing that the creature was not responding Lex continued.

"Oh, I suppose I forgot to introduce myself. I am the Innkeeper, the owner of this humble establishment. I hope you have been finding your stay at the Inn to your liking."

The creature shook its head forlornly and said, "I cannot enjoy much of anything right now."

"Oh, is something wrong?"

The creature did not reply immediately and only looked at the Innkeeper, a mental struggle going on in its head. It was not inexperienced or stupid. It knew that some things should be kept to itself. But it was desperate, and that desperation slowly overwhelmed the parts of its rational mind that told it to keep its secrets close to itself.

"The universe... it really is... too big." The creature finally said, letting out what Lex could only assume was a sigh and not what it seemed, a gale.

"I do not understand it. Nor do I understand this form," it said looking down at its rocky arms. "It is beyond me, and what I thought was possible. Yet I am alive and in need of answers. I was hoping that you, as someone who wields enormous strength and has created something so grand, could provide me with some answers."

Lex looked into those earnest, rocky eyes. This... was not what he was expecting. Even though the shape was different, in those eyes he saw a pain that was all too human.

"I can only say that I will try my best to answer your questions. If your questions are sensitive, would you like to go somewhere more private before we have our discussion?"

The creature nodded, and before it could get up to move, Lex teleported both of them to his office.

During the Midnight games, Lex added a feature to the Inn that allowed creatures that were massive to shrink down in size automatically when they tried to enter buildings, so that they too could use all the Inn's facilities. Otherwise, if Lex had to recreate every facility for every sized being it would end up being quite tedious.

The rock creature was also surprised by the sudden change in location, and its size, but it quickly adapted. It seemed to grow even more assured in the Innkeepers power.

"This... is my second life," the creature began, getting right into the thick of things.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 444: Reincarnation

The entire Inn seemed to notice that the giant mountain creature had spontaneously disappeared. The disappearance itself had quite a mixed reaction, for some guests were relieved while others were disappointed - they were either afraid the creature would go on a rampage, or wanted the opportunity to take a picture in front of it. Most, though, didn't care one way or another what happened to it as they

thought it was quite normal to see unusual beings at the Inn. Only a short while ago there had been a dragon living at the Inn.

But the creature in question itself did not care what people thought about its disappearance, nor did Lex, the person responsible for teleporting it away. The creature, instead, was solely focused on his story while Lex had his entire focus on not losing his cool. The Host Attire was once again showing its worth by preventing Lex from showing his real emotions on his face when he heard what the creature had to say.

"This is my second life," the creature began. "In my first life, I was just a normal human, a soldier working for his country. I lived, I fought, I... I died in that country... without ever experiencing something so strange as... the universe. But when I died I... I don't remember what happened. All I knew was that one moment I was dying, the next moment I was waking up with my face buried in the ground. When I picked myself up... I had become this monster."

"Are you sure you didn't have any strange, unexplainable encounters in your previous life? Such as some kind of magic jewelry, or discovering an ancient treasure, or entering a strange domain. Maybe you had a dream that did not really feel like a dream?"

Lex was asking a question, not because he was familiar with reincarnation - he was not. It was something he had not considered too seriously, but now, with his knowledge, he knew that it was only a matter of preserving the soul. Well, there were probably a few extra steps involved that Lex didn't know, but basically he had seen enough to believe it. No, instead, the reason he asked was that he clearly remembered how significant the event of receiving a system was for himself. He had been literally assaulted by a shooting star, after all. He was searching for any similarities whatsoever to his own experience to determine if a system was involved. This was but one of the multiple strategies he had thought of.

"Ah, no, I don't think so. I mean, I don't remember. I was not... superstitious in my past life, so even if I did have a strange dream, or encountered something unusual, I would have believed it to be a scam or trickery, and would not have paid it much mind."

The creature paused to see if the Innkeeper had any more questions, but he didn't, it continued. The only problem was, it didn't know how to say what it wanted.

"I... what... the thing..." the creature became flustered, unable to form the question that he wanted.

"Do you want to ask how this happened?" Lex asked gently. "Or perhaps, is there something you want?"

"No, I don't want anything. No, I mean, yes, I do want something, but that's not it. Was it... was it even real? My past life, everything I remember, did it even happen? Can I... can I go back, somehow?"

The last question was uttered using all of the creature's strength, for in its heart, metaphorically speaking for it did not have a heart, the creature already suspected an answer.

Lex contemplated his words carefully before he spoke.

"Do you have a name?" he asked first, his voice calm but gentle.

The question also woke the creature up from its stupor, reminding it that it had yet to introduce itself.

"Ming Jie! I mean, in my last life, I was called Ming Jie."

"Well, Ming Jie, I'm sure everything seems very different to you right now. But as strange and fantastical as it is, some things will stay the same. Like I'm sure you know from your previous life, nothing happens without a reason. Crops will grow if you tend to them, and will die if you ignore them. Gems and precious stones can become valuable if polished, or become nothing more than a pretty rock in a child's collection if ignored. Light comes when the sun rises, and darkness falls as the sun sets. If you eat, you will satiate your hunger, and if you do not, you will starve. Some causes and effects are more complicated than the examples I have stated, but the principle remains the same.

"Believe it or not, even as vast as the universe is, reincarnation is not so simple a matter, especially with one's memories of the past. So, if this happened, then it was not an accident. It happened for some reason."

Lex paused. He had been building up to his second probe about the system, but his own speech resulted in him having a realization about something completely unrelated. Everything... has a reason, whether you understood it or not.

Ming Jie, however, mistook his pause as the Innkeeper having completed what he wanted to say.

"Are you saying that I reincarnated... for some reason? To fulfill some grand purpose? Was it perhaps... the will of God?"

"Whether there is a purpose or not, only you can decide that. As for Gods... I wouldn't put too much stock in them. No, what I meant was, since your question is about your reincarnation, to get an answer, we need to understand how it is you reincarnated. For like I said, it is no common ordeal. Only then can we begin to answer questions like if it's possible for you to go back to your world. Though one thing, unfortunately, is almost certain. Even if you find a way to return to your own world, you will not be able to return to your old life. After all, we cannot even say for certain how much time has passed since you died."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 445: The way of the systems

Ming Jie was not shocked by what he heard. After all, he had already had a long time to think about things before the Innkeeper arrived. It was easy to assume that he reincarnated the moment he died, for it had felt that way to him. But with this matter, he was really out of his scope. While it was a possibility that not much time had passed, it was equally possible, and even more likely, that at least some time had elapsed between him dying and reincarnating.

Unfortunately, the mere fact that there was a possibility that not much time had elapsed gave Ming Jie hope, and that hope prevented him from moving on.

The Innkeeper said that the answer to his questions lay in finding the reason for his reincarnation, but to him it wasn't really a mystery. Although he did not understand where it came from, or even what its purpose was, his system literally called itself the 'Reincarnated as a Mountain' system.

This system, whatever it was, had directly resulted in his reincarnation. Moreover, it was giving him strange objectives, such as finding an optimal place to lay its foundation.

Should he tell the Innkeeper about it?

"If I... if we figure out how it happened, even if I can't go back to the way things were, can I at least find a way to go back to my... to that 'planet'?"

Lex paused and thought carefully about what he should say. The conversation veered into domains that he knew little about. After all, how was he supposed to trace what planet Ming Jie was from? Sure, given time, Lex would spread the Inn's reach far and wide. But how far was the planet that Ming Jie was from? If he had to rely on chance, how long would it take?

"It is not so straightforward. After all, we do not even know what 'planet' you are from or where it is. I'll be honest with you, going back will not be a simple thing. But, if my suspicions are correct, it's not the place that you long for, is it?"

Ming Jie did not answer, but the answer was certain.

"I'll be direct with you, going back or finding the people you're searching for will not be easy. In fact, even if there is an opportunity, the only way you'll seize it is by becoming stronger, much stronger."

Lex did not want to lie to Ming Jie, but most likely, even if he ever found his previous planet again, it would take so long that whoever he was searching for would be dead. As far as Lex knew, once a person dies, their soul dissipates. But he'd seen enough of the universe to know that he shouldn't say anything with absolute certainty, because reality had a way of flipping it on your head. What if there really was an afterlife? Or what if there was a domain where all souls go to after people die? Heck, what if there was a heaven and hell system that collected souls from all over the universe?

These were things that Lex couldn't possibly know, at least for the moment. But as time went by, and he grew stronger and his reach expanded, he was sure he would come in contact with them. So it wouldn't necessarily be a lie if Lex said that one day, he could provide Ming Jie with the answers he wanted. But, and it may seem selfish to say this, what incentive did Lex have to help him?

He could do it out of the goodness of his heart, for it wasn't costing Lex anything, but from the day Lex founded the Inn, he knew that this wasn't something he could start doing. After all, why help Ming Jie and not others? And if he started helping everyone he came across in need, Lex himself would become overwhelmed and become in need.

"Grow stronger?" Ming Jie asked in confusion. Of course he didn't understand. He'd never encountered cultivation. The only way he knew of growing stronger in his previous life was exercise, which would not nearly be enough.

"Yes, grow stronger," Lex affirmed. "In the universe, there are ways of transcending the station of your birth, and becoming an overlord capable of swimming even in stars. It is known as cultivation, and it is a path open for the smallest of ants to the simplest of humans, though finding a suitable path may be harder for some than others. If you discover what caused your reincarnation, you could potentially also embark on the cultivation path."

Lex paused and looked at Ming Jie in the eyes as he absorbed the information he was providing.

"Of course, if you follow the path set for you through your reincarnation, it may lead you in a direction unfit for your goals. After all, what you want is the strength to look for your loved ones, but what the 'system' wants may be something else."

Lex observed Ming Jie carefully as he spoke. This was yet another one of his probes. If Ming Jie really was a system wielder, the mention of a system may alarm him and cause a reaction, or may even make him think systems were common knowledge and may openly admit to it. It was a vulnerability he possessed due to his lack of experience and knowledge of the universe. Yet if he was not a system wielder, Lex could easily explain that by system he was referring to the cycle that caused his reincarnation. After all, there was a very real possibility that this had nothing to do with a system. Lex still did not truly understand the depths of the universe, as had become evident by his recent failures.

This was not the last probe that Lex had planned, but was definitely one of the more direct ones. Time seemed to slow down for him as he waited for a reaction. Mind Jie did not disappoint.

He had been looking down at his hands, lost in thought, but the mention of 'system' caused face to snap up, locking eyes with the Innkeeper.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 446: Spreading news

While Lex and Mind Jie were having a conversation in his office, news of the upcoming event had already begun to spread. How could it not, when Lex himself set all the gears in motion? He paid for the event, activated the marketing, informed the workers and distributed responsibilities. But while all the responsibilities and tasks should have gone to his workers, there was one exception that also received orders - albeit, in a more roundabout manner than the workers themselves.

In the cold, dark void of space, a massive vessel moved silently in a straight line. This was an unusually empty region of space. There were no star systems nearby, no asteroids or space rocks, nothing. In fact, this particular region of space was far from everything and near nothing. Even when commuting to regions of space beyond it, there was no reason for a ship to roam these parts without using Hyper-speed. All common sense indicated that there was no reason for this ship to be here, yet it moved forward with purpose.

It was a large vessel, and a keen observer would notice the signs of it being freshly minted. It wasn't just the smooth and clean exterior that had not seen hundreds of years of age that gave away the vessel's age, but also the distinct lack of disturbance it created in the surrounding spirit energy, as thin as it was. This wasn't really modern technology, just that as a ship aged it would become harder and harder to maintain it regardless of the resources one had. Some deterioration in performance was unavoidable.

On the bridge, the commander of this ship wore an extremely grim expression, and though he had his arms folded behind his back in a seemingly casual manner, his fists had been clenched tight.

Silently, and without warning, the ship crossed an invisible veil and disappeared from view to the rest of the universe. Within the veil, though, was a massive space station the size of a small moon. Hundreds of vessels had been parked wherever they found free terminals, and thousands more seemed to hover in space waiting for their turn.

But the new vessel did not wait for a turn, and immediately went to a specific terminal that nobody else seemed to venture near. In the vacuum it was impossible for noise to travel, yet a buzz seemed to fill the area nonetheless as everyone's eyes turned to the ship and in hushed tones whispered, "Booty has returned."

Yes, first mate Booty of the Iron Heart pirates, who had been rumored to have left the pirating life behind to instead become a marketing agent, had voluntarily returned home. This was bound to create a buzz, after all, who didn't know that first mate Booty was the captain's favorite? Yet the news of his betrayal had not had any reaction whatsoever. Now his return sprouted only new rumors. What was really going on?

Booty cared for none of it. He only looked forward as he stood still on a segway that seemed to lead him deep inside Heart Station.

Eventually he arrived in a dark room where he stepped off and bowed towards the darkness, his suede jacket pressing firmly against his chest.

"You have finally returned. Are you here to take my head?"

"Never, captain!" Booty shouted, sweat pouring down his pale face.

"Then why have you returned? I thought you left the pirating life behind. You were too good for it, anyway."

"Captain, I... I brought news! There's finally hope for you... for you to enter the immortal realm!"

A golden key appeared in Booty's hands as he began to explain about the upcoming festival and, more importantly, about the star rank increase. Due to his excellent performance in marketing previously, Lex made a special mention to his workers to give the job to Booty again. Little did he know that instead of spreading the news, he had returned to the real Captain of the Iron Heart pirates. She sat in the darkness, hidden from view. Her identity had to remain a secret at all costs. As if being a pirate wasn't enough, if people were to learn who the captain was, there would be no sanctuary left where the Jotun Empire had influence.

In another part of space, a devil appeared in front of Lorretta, sharing the same news. A breakthrough in cultivation was too great an attraction to overlook.

Elsewhere, Ragnar was reading an emergency report. For once, hesitation appeared in his eyes. If he had a breakthrough, he'd be in closed cultivation for months, if not years. Was this really the time?

In a med center on the galactic battlefield, an injured Alexander received new orders. His efforts had paid off. The Empire would invest in him, and help him re-cultivate from scratch, and his new journey would begin at the Inn.

In the Crystal realm, Roland returned to share the news with Aegis. No matter what his personal decision was, this was not something he should overlook.

On Earth, the oracle Vera Joel was desperate to find a way to return to the Inn, but her jailors had finally caught on and regularly searched her and others to make sure they had no keys. But how could she

explain that for her, it was not just about gaining an opportunity, but escaping a catastrophe? If only her visions were more regular.

In the realm Garvitz, some devils had returned to provide a report. Warheil Heil Fednal, the devil solely responsible for creating the zombie demons, smiled. It was an opportunity for his children to grow.

An agent of the Henali who had been stationed at the Inn quickly retreated to deliver the news. Though, unlike the rest, this agent had no urgency. He worked for the overlords of the entire realm. Compared to them, how truly helpful could the Inn's festival really be?

Unbeknownst to Lex, who was going through revelations of his own, his festival that he only used for security was about to be far more successful than he could have imagined.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 447: Payment

There was silence in the room as the two looked at one another. The Innkeeper was as calm and stoic as ever, while Ming Jie was having rapid mood swings. First there was alarm, for he thought he had revealed a secret he was meant to keep close to himself. Then there was panic, as he realized that even if the secret hadn't been revealed, his reaction might have tipped off the Innkeeper. Then there was ambivalence, as the Innkeeper was not showing any reaction at all whatsoever, which led Ming Jie to wonder if he was over-thinking things.

A part of himself was also admonishing himself. He was not an inexperienced man, but his extreme emotions had made him vulnerable, otherwise he would not have made such a basic mistake. But what he needed to decide now was how to react. The Innkeeper did not seem at all perturbed by the knowledge that he had a system, so maybe it wasn't a big deal at all.

He spent a few more moments to collect himself and then recalled what it was the Innkeeper had even said.

Finally, filled with hesitation, Ming Jie asked, "What do you mean by a 'system' wanting something else?"

The focus was back on Lex, and so was the pressure. While initially he was probing, and had the discretion to lead the conversation in a different direction should Ming Jie not respond to his system about comments, he was the one being questioned now. He had been reassured, for Ming Jie's reaction was a strong indicator that he was a system wielder, he had not admitted it outright. If Lex chose to imply that by system he meant the cycle of reincarnation, he would lose out on the possibility of exposing Ming Jie.

But if he continued and explained about systems as he knew them, but Ming Jie did not have a system, it would make the Innkeeper look like he didn't know what he was talking about.

It was a delicate situation, but Lex was not too perturbed. The reason was simple: he would only need to care what his perception was if they were conversing as equals, which they were not. Ming Jie was an uninformed, lost soul while the Innkeeper was a mysterious and powerful entity. Even if the conversation went in a direction that might make the Innkeeper look imperceptive, he could spin the conversation by saying Ming Jie was too low level to understand what he meant.

"Systems are interesting entities. They wield enormous power, and even provide unimaginable assistance to their wielders. But, and this is the important part, to gain that assistance, you have to play by the system's rules. You have to follow the direction they set, and march according to their beat if you want their rewards. If you want to retain control, or even your identity, you have to be very careful about how you play along."

Lex paused to see if Ming Jie had anything to say, but the Mountain-man was silently absorbing all that Lex had said, so he continued.

"Of course, having a system is not in of itself a bad thing. Like I said, as long as they are used carefully, they can provide you with immense shortcuts, and that can be the key to your growth. If you want to cultivate without it, you will have to search for a cultivation method for your new species first. It shouldn't be too hard, I'm sure it exists, and you could even use the Inn's services to look for one. But how much you'd have to spend to successfully find one, and moreover find one that is actually stable and even suits you, is a question you'd have to discover the answer for on your own."

Lex was extremely tempted to directly ask, or at least hint at his curiosity at what Ming jie's system was. But he had to remind himself that he had to maintain an aloof image. Systems were beneath him. The Innkeeper had no need for systems. That was the image he had to maintain.

Ming Jie ran through all the various options in his head. Without the system he might not be able to get a suitable cultivation technique, whereas with the system he could cultivate but would have to act according to the system's requirements.

After a while, Ming Jie asked, "Is there a way for me to turn back into a human?"

Lex was genuinely stumped by the question. Was changing species even possible? Well actually, Ming Jie had accomplished it somehow, so surely it was.

"That is not so simple. But, like I told you before, once you grow stronger and your cultivation reaches a high enough level, you'll be able to do things you can't even imagine right now."

"What if I give up my system? Will that change me back?"

Pure excitement ran through Lex's mind as he finally got the confirmation he was looking for, but his expression was still the same.

"Do you have reason to believe that your system is what's keeping you in your current form?"

"Yes, it's called the 'Reincarnated as a Mountain system'. What if I get rid of it? What if I give it to you? Can I turn back into a human?"

Ming Jie didn't know the worth of a system, but since it had immense power it was surely valuable. If he could give the system as payment for the Innkeepers help, that would make things incredibly convenient. Besides, since it would take growing stronger to get what he wanted, wasn't an easier solution to just ask someone who is already strong for help? And who better than this mysterious Innkeeper to ask for help? He was ready to give up on all his shortcuts if that's what it took.

Lex, on the other hand, did not respond immediately. The temptation to absorb another system was great, but he couldn't bring himself to kill an innocent man just to get it. If he was giving it of his own accord, however...

"Mary, can I take his system without killing him?"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 448: Secrets

"Mary, can I take his system without killing him?" Lex asked mentally as he observed Ming Jie.

"If the system has not fused with his soul yet, it should technically be possible to extract it without killing him. But you would have to check his soul for that first."

Before he continued, Lex used his connection to the Inn delivered through the chair to scan the library of the Inn. The first batch of techniques had been delivered by the Infinity Emporium, and Lex looked through them for any and all soul related techniques. Though they were not many in quantity, it was only a relative number. He easily found quite a few he could use right now if he learned them, and even more that would become available to him once he reached the Golden Core realm.

It was not a big deal if Lex had Ming Jie wait a bit before answering him, but the more important question to answer was...

"Assume we can extract the system. Will it turn him back into a human?"

"This... it's not a question that I can easily answer. But based on the name of the system, it only helped him reincarnate as a Mountain, and is not keeping him in that state. Based on that logic, even if the system is removed, he should stay in his current form."

"That's what I feared."

Lex reached the same conclusion on his own, but he wanted to ask Mary anyway in case she knew something more about systems.

Although he had gotten an answer, Lex did not rush to reply to Ming Jie. He was considering the possibility of another option. The result of his previous risk with the Henali had made him reluctant to take risky actions. Yet at the same time, only by taking risks could he get maximum rewards.

"Mary, if I make him my employee, can I make his system a subsidiary of mine? Moreover, will he be able to find out that I have a system?"

"Him becoming an employee will have no effect on his system whatsoever. But there is a chance that his system will have a reaction to your system, the way yours shows error messages apparently for other system users. It all depends on the rating of his system. The closer the systems rank to yours, the more likely it is to have a reaction. In fact, even if it's not close, because the Midnight Inn is not running at 100% functionality, and seems to be broken or damaged, chances are that his system will pick up on yours. If your system were running at full capacity, because of its high rating, most systems of lower ranks wouldn't be able to detect it at all."

That was both disappointing and alarming. It was disappointing because Lex really wanted to upgrade his system further somehow, but he didn't want to get into the business of killing innocent people. It was alarming because John was a system user and had been at the Inn for a long time. He didn't know if it was such a good idea to continue having him work here if it could endanger Lex's own secrets.

But first he had to deal with the matter at hand. A few moments had passed since Ming Jie asked the question, and he was waiting anxiously for a reply.

"Most likely," Lex finally began to reply slowly, "even if the system is removed, you will stay as you are. That is because the system was only responsible for reincarnating you like this, not keeping you this way."

Ming Jie was disappointed because it seemed like the only possible option for him would be to follow along with his system.

"Going along with your system does not have to be a bad thing," Lex said, changing the conversation. Since he couldn't get the system, he had to make sure to build a relationship so he could keep a tab on Ming Jie.

"You just have to be careful how you interpret the direction it's taking you in. They can be more flexible than they seem. I will only give you two pieces of advice. First, do not be impatient. I don't doubt that you're in a hurry to grow stronger to achieve your goals, but cultivation is not a path that can be tread lightly. A single mistake can cost you immensely. Second, do not share the knowledge of your system with anyone. They are not as common as you may think, and not everyone will be as disinterested as I."

"Thank you, I will keep your advice and your guidance in mind," replied Ming Jie as he stood up. Even he understood that their conversation was at an end. What he needed to do now, before making any decisions, was take some time and calm down. He needed his emotions to stabilize so that he wouldn't make any rash decisions.

Lex teleported him out to a secluded spot, though he was still visible from far and wide. Lex had to absorb all the new information he just received and decide how he would use it in the future. But first, he sat and mused over the recent realization he had.

While explaining things to Ming Jie, in particular when he was mentioning that everything happens for a reason, even if you may not be able to understand the reasons, a random thought occurred to Lex.

What if him getting the system was not as 'random' as it appeared? Well, the truth was, Lex didn't actually believe for even a second that the system which could cause teleportations across the universe would 'stall' and accidentally fall to him. But this time his thoughts went further.

What if the secret his family was keeping was the reason the system had fallen, or perhaps even chosen him? This was wild speculation, for he didn't expect his family to have too large of a secret. He imagined something more along the lines of him not being their actual child and his parents being forced to adopt him for various reasons or something like that. But what if it wasn't?

He knew it was pointless asking Mary, for she would only say he didn't have the authority to know. But he began to wonder nonetheless.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 449: Manipulating the system

Lex sat in his office ruminating over the systems intentions. He had not lied when he told Ming Jie that he had to be careful about following the systems direction, for the system would endlessly push him towards its own goals, but Lex had experienced first hand how getting in over his head had caused him problems.

Other than that, he also thought about the problem regarding his family. He was more than inclined to just ignore them, but just because he ignored them did not mean any problems they could cause would ignore him. Yet at the same time he was not in the mood to go face them, or investigate himself.

He also didn't want to use his resources at the Inn to investigate, because he did not know if the system had any relation to them. It was a headache all around.

Come to think of it, it had been many months since he last saw, or even spoke to his family. He was sure that they would have noticed his absence by now, and would have picked up his anomalous behavior as of late. Going back now might lead to a confrontation, which was a separate issue.

In the end, he sighed. This was not an issue he would solve any time soon. He also didn't want to discuss it with Mary. It wasn't that he didn't trust her, but he felt talking to her about any suspicions he had regarding the system would be redundant. He'd heard the answer she'd given enough times to know how that would end.

Instead, he turned his attention to the next issue on the list. It was one that had plagued the Inn for a long time, but one he didn't get around to solving, not only because he was extremely busy, but because there wasn't a clear solution to it either.

"Mary, I'm sure you already know this, but people have been using the Inn's teleportation ability to cause a lot of harm. How can we fix this?"

"Gaining control over the teleportation function of the System requires a higher authority," she said, with a hint of desperation in her voice.

"We can't wait for a higher authority," Lex said as he perused the system interface. "Criminals and terrorists are using the teleportation feature in sensitive areas, using the Inn as a hideout, and then teleporting back at the most inopportune moments to cause chaos. If this kind of behavior is allowed to continue, it will not only ruin the Inn's reputation, but earn us a lot of unnecessary enemies."

More than Mary's reply, Lex waited in anticipation for a system notification. He had long noticed how the system had a tendency to react to his conversations as long as they had anything to do with the Inn, but this was the first time he was actively trying to use it for his direct benefit. The system, fortunately, stayed true to its previously set pattern.

New Quest: The Host's attention to detail has spotted problematic behavior with some guests. Devise a holistic solution to the given problem.

Rewards: Temporary authority to adjust teleporting permission, Fruit Knife upgrade material

Remarks: Some people, with great attention to detail, would also notice themselves having horrendous hairstyles.

"Rather than stressing about how, think of possible solutions first. What if the system checks if the location of teleportation is public property, or belongs to the guest teleporting. If they're teleporting to the Inn from a private place, like someone else's home, or say a secure facility, when they get sent back they're teleported to the nearest public space."

"There are too many ways that could go wrong. There are countless planets with toxic environments, and I'm sure many guests want to maintain their anonymity. What if changing their teleportation location sends them into a place with toxic fumes, or lands them in front of an enemy who is just crossing a random street. The probability is low, but it's also inevitable."

"Well, keep thinking of possible solutions. The only other thing I can think of at the moment is to prevent people from teleporting to the Inn if their location is problematic somehow. But that in itself is hard to judge."

After excusing Mary, Lex teleported away. The system's remark reminded him about Harry, so he decided to check up on him.

In his private room, a pale-looking Harry was holding Hailey's hand and softly talking to her. He had woken up a few days ago, and his soul had recovered completely, mostly due to the fact that the medicine used was meant for someone much stronger than him to begin with. The problem was his body. Although he had healed, his vitality was critically injured. It could not keep itself running for even a moment if he was taken out of the Recovery pod. Fortunately, all was not bad, and Harry had an idea of how to remedy the situation.

There was a soft knock on the door, attracting the couple's attention. They were not surprised, for countless visitors had paid short visits to check on Harry's health, from other workers to regular clients of Harrys.

Hailey opened the door and saw a rather handsome looking man standing politely at the door. She did not recognize him as the Innkeeper, for she had not seen him before, but she invited him in, nonetheless.

"My apologies for my late arrival." the Innkeeper said as he walked in the room. "I believe I also still owe you a wedding present."

"Innkeeper!" Harry was startled and tried to get up but the Innkeeper quickly dissuaded him.

"Don't get up, you need to rest. I came to check up on your condition. I am very ashamed that you had to suffer such grievous wounds at the Inn."

"No, no, it's not your fault, and you don't have anything to be ashamed of. If anything, I should be grateful. Nurse Jubilation informed me of how you personally had some medicine for me sent over."

"It seems I did not send over enough medicine," the Innkeeper mentioned as he observed Harry's weak physical condition. "Worry not, I will have something arranged. You'll be back to full health in no time."

"No, Innkeeper, you don't need to do that. In fact, I have been meaning to reach out to you myself. I want to build a Serenity pond, it's something I learned about from the Sorcery heritage you provided me with. With it, I'll be able to overcome my current situation on my own, and then I can even use it as a service I offer to guests."

"Say nothing of it. I'll send Luthor over, and you need only inform him of what you need."

"Thank you Innkeeper, I'll prepare the list immediately."

"Be sure to rest well and recover quickly. You have done a great service to the Inn. Once you've completely healed, I'll deliver your wedding present to you. You can look forward to it."

Lex left immediately after. He could tell that his presence was forcing Harry to be more energetic than he could afford, and he did not miss picking up on the faint disapproval Hailey felt for him. She did not show it, and had only silently stood in the corner while they talked, but could Lex be unable to detect it?

Even if it wasn't for his incredible senses, the Host Attire made him even more sensitive to anything that was happening at the Inn. Well, he couldn't blame her. Not only had he missed their wedding, but Harry had nearly died protecting his Inn. It was only natural to develop a negative opinion about him. That was not taking into consideration the fact that whoever liked their spouses boss?

He sent Luthor a message to have him collect the list from Harry and help him wherever he could, before he scanned the Inn for the next target he wanted to meet.

While Ming Jie had attracted a lot of attention, and may seem like the most noteworthy guest that had arrived during his previous coma, there was one more guest that required his attention: the new spirit!

Not only did Lex want to greet this new permanent resident of the Inn, he even needed his help to figure out how to control the spaceship! Speaking of which, he should probably hire a permanent crew for the ship who can specialize in how to use it?

He looked up at the massive ship and wondered how many people it would take to run that thing. It was several hundred miles just in length, and covered almost the entire length of the Inn with its shadow.

Lex shook his head and hired a single new worker for now - the person who would captain the ship.

"Cirk reporting for duty, sir!" said a tall, pale man with dark hair who appeared next to Lex.

"Cirk, you'll be captain of that ship up there," Lex said, pointing up in the sky. "Now come on, you'll need to learn how to use it."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 450: Tuition Fee

Beyond the Grave was an extremely broken ability that the Inn had gained, in Lex's opinion at least. While it did not completely revive a dying person, it allowed them to continue to exist, at least in some form, for a limited duration of time.

When Lex first read about it, one of the fears he had was that once this became widely known, the Inn would have more ghosts than actual guests. After all, people die every day, and if they discover a way to continue to live, even if it was for a short time, he expected many people would avail it.

Yet his worries seemed unlikely, at least for the moment. This was due to the fact that the only guest who had used the ability so far had spent an enormous amount of money - a truly stupendous amount - and gotten 13,000 years.

Most people, even if they were considered wealthy, probably could not match the wealth of this guest, so the amount of time they would stay would be relatively short. Still, this increased the pressure on Lex to yet again increase the size of the Inn, and maybe create a specific zone that would 'attract' his spirit residents, for he couldn't really force his guests to stay in a specific area.

For that, first, he had to learn about spirits. Fortunately, the Inn was now connected to the Henali portal which had allowed him to conduct a search earlier on.

The first thing that came to one's mind when someone said the term 'spirit' was one of the three fundamental aspects of living beings. Spirit, when mentioned in the context of living beings in general, is what provides them with the ability to think and behave in certain ways.

So then, what does it mean to exist as a spirit, or be from the spirit race? The answer was closer to Lex's original assumption of ghosts than he had originally realized.

Spirits, or the spirit race, was a generic term used for beings which only had a soul and spirit, but no body. There were further specifications, for not all spirits were the same or had the same attributes. But as far as the Inn's ability was concerned, it referred to the most common kind of spirit.

They had no real shape, and were most commonly perceived as being balls of translucent sentient energy. Various professions such as oracles, prophets, mystics and such often communicated with spirits for various tasks, for their ability to interact with energy without the energy changing form due to passing through a body gave them special insight and abilities.

Generally, they could pass through any physical barriers, as they were nothing more than an accumulated clump of energy.

They communicate telepathically, though they could still 'hear' what other beings were saying due to the disturbance their voices caused in the ambient energy.

They did not have the typical senses of touch, sight, hearing, etc. but rather a collection of their own senses based on energy fluctuations.

Different spirits were formed of different energy types and usually stayed in areas dense with that specific kind of energy.

Lex revised all this information in his mind as he scanned the Inn for the new spirit, and found it in an extremely remote corner of the Inn. In fact, let alone guests, there weren't even any birds or small animals in the area.

Clearly he wanted to be alone, but Lex couldn't afford to wait so he would have to intrude. He and Cirk teleported away, appearing at a patch of open area lacking most trees and bushes. It was just grass and some wild flowers, far from any road or path.

A grayish translucent ball was hovering in the air just above the ground, not moving at all. Lex scanned the ball to see what he could learn about the guest.

Name: Abroar Kashinga Lilai...(click to expand)... Jameel

Age: 0

Cultivation Details: None

Species: Spirit

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Once a giant gray thing, now not a thing at all. Still gray, though.

Lex was surprised, but not by much. He had been expecting Abroar to show up at some point, and even suspected that he was the one who might have arrived. He just didn't expect that unusually sentimental guy to be so wealthy.

"I'm glad to see you could make it," said Lex. "Although it's quite unfortunate that you were brought to such a state to begin with."

"I must do what is necessary for my race... my former race," Abroar replied, his voice echoing in both Lex's and Cirk's mind. "At least this way I can also watch over one of the few remaining members of my race as it grows. I can also teach it and give it guidance. Hopefully, I will complete my mission and rid us of our enemies before the young one has to face them."

"It might not seem like much to you," began Lex, remembering that Abroar had originally been over 800,000 years old. "But you have at least 13,000 years at the Inn to use. Hopefully, you'll have enough time to complete your tasks by then."

"Indeed, I hope. I am also grateful to you, Innkeeper. Were it not for your guidance, I would not have even had this refuge."

"I hope you find the Inn to your liking during your stay. We have many activities going on here all the time, so I'm sure you'll be entertained. I also plan on adding some features to better cater to spirits soon. When the time arrives, please give me an honest review."

"I have no doubt that they will be magnificent."

"I will try," replied Lex with a smile. "I hate to bother you when you have just arrived, but I was wondering if I could get some of your assistance with a matter."

"Please, do not hesitate to pass orders. I have yet to fully repay you for your grace of extending my life."

"There's no need to talk of repayment, you have already paid sufficiently for your time here. Consider this as doing me a small favor. This here behind me is Cirk, I plan for him to be the captain of the ship you have given me. I would appreciate it if you could teach him as much as possible about the ship."

"Consider it done! I will oversee his education myself, and will assist him until he is completely proficient in every aspect of the ship."

"Excellent. If possible, teach him as much as possible about the basics as you can in a week. I'm planning on using the ship during an event, though don't worry too much as the ship's involvement will be minimal. At the same time, I'm sending you some MP as well. Since you're going to be living here, and there's a festival coming up, you'll need it."

Lex sent Abroar 200 million MP, for now. While it may seem like an absurd amount, it had to be remembered that Abroar was basically teaching Cirk how to pilot a massive spaceship! Lex honestly expected it to be a few years before a crew was ready to properly pilot the thing, so this was only the beginning. Considering how useful the ship would be to Lex in the long run, this was barely acceptable as tuition money.

Lex was about to continue the conversation, but something happened which caused Lex to apologize promptly and teleport away.

Cork and the gray floating ball were left alone, quite suddenly, possibly looking at each other. It felt awkward, because Cirk didn't even know if the 'ball' of energy was looking back at him. Moreover...

"So uhh... can the ship beam us up or something? I'm not sure how else to get up there. I can't really fly."

Lex had teleported back to his apartment and quickly sat down with his legs crossed in the meditation room. His cultivation was causing him issues!

This was the first time Lex experienced such a thing, mostly because of how stable Regal Embrace was. Every other cultivator had plenty of experience with these things, mostly because their cultivation techniques were never able to stabilize spirit energy to the same level as Regal Embrace.

Still, even when he was experiencing problems, his problem was extremely unique. His body and Foundation were too exquisite, naturally pushing his cultivation to the next level. Sure, Lex could break

through right now and it would be a smooth breakthrough, but his instincts told him that breaking through when the star rating is being increased will benefit him greatly.

So, while other cultivators struggled to maintain their cultivation and keep it from causing problems within their bodies, Lex had to struggle with his cultivation to keep it from naturally increasing. It was a lot harder than imagined, and left Lex physically and mentally exhausted.

He had to wait 2 more weeks before he could breakthrough, and something told him it would be a long wait.