

Innkeeper 47

The Innkeeper

Chapter 47: Traitors?

Hammad was about to lose his temper at Alexander's casual attitude when he suddenly heard a soft roaring in the distance. The sound, though soft at first, was quickly becoming louder. He looked up in the sky towards where Alexander was looking and saw ten flaming balls shooting towards them at breakneck speed!

"Dodge!" was all he had time to shout before the ten flaming balls crashed into the ground before them, completely destroying the road and launching debris everywhere. A cloud of dust filled the air, but it was quickly blown away by a gust of wind revealing ten tall, cylindrical pods. A hatch on one of them was kicked open, revealing a soldier, fully armored in black, synthetic gear. Immediately after the other pods were opened as well, revealing the soldiers within. They all were dressed identically, and with a mask over their face you would not be able to tell them apart if they weren't all carrying different weapons.

One of the soldiers who was carrying an ax and a shield walked towards Alexander and kneeled before shouting, "Titan 036 reporting for duty."

Alexander looked at the Golden Core cultivator kneeling before him, but maintained an indifferent expression on his face.

"I want the airspace above all of Egypt sealed and all outgoing traffic stopped. I want full deployment of the 3rd Morrison Brigade in all of Egypt, and all cultivator movement needs to be temporarily stopped. I want the owner of that auction house found and captured, and I want the regional head for A.D.F. in our custody as well. Evacuate nearby civilians and capture all of my assailants. If capture becomes too difficult simply kill them. I also need a set of acupuncture needles, but if none of you have a set, a very sharp knife will do."

"You have your orders Titans," roared Titan 036, as he quickly turned around and started chasing Alexander's assassins. As soon as the pods had crashed onto the road the assassins started to flee, deploying all kinds of techniques eliminating their traces - but that was none of Alexander's concerns. He did not doubt the Titans ability to find them.

One of the Titans approached Alexander and handed him a black pouch, before quickly leaving as well. None of the Titans stayed behind to protect Alexander in case more assassins came after him - it was as if the idea of him being in danger never occurred to them at all.

Greg and Helen stood frozen, feeling a mix of shock and horror at what was happening. Soldiers had dropped from the sky? Deploying troops in all of Egypt? CAPTURE THE REGION HEAD OF A.D.F.? The A.D.F. was the African Defense Front, similar to Blue Bird in that it was responsible for monitoring cultivator activity in Africa, but different from Blue Bird in that instead of being one organization it was a cluster of smaller organizations banding together. Still, that did not mean the A.D.F. was weak, or something that could be casually be messed with.

Ignoring their confusion, Alexander turned towards Greg and dashed towards him. Before he had time to realize what was happening, Alexander punched hard directly in the stomach! The wind left Greg's body as he keeled over in pain, vomiting out the contents of his stomach. But that wasn't the worst of it - Alexander had not only punched him, he had released a burst of spiritual energy in Greg's body directly burning his meridians. All the spiritual energy Greg had accumulated in his life left his body, for he had become crippled.

Paying no mind to his reaction Alexander flipped him over and removed his shirt, before taking out four acupuncture needles. The Titans naturally didn't keep these needles for medicinal purposes! They were coated in poison and could be used as hidden weapons, not to mention they were made from a metal that conducted spiritual energy increasing their uses manifold. Using a simple spirit technique, Alexander summoned a flame in his hand which he used to sterilize the acupuncture needles and vaporize any poison on it - he could not afford to accidentally kill Greg before his task was complete.

Once the needles were sterilized he directly injected them into Greg's heart, until they eventually reached the Heart Meridian Mother Gu. As its name suggested, the Heart Meridian Mother Gu attached itself to the meridians around one's heart. The Mother Gu fed on the spiritual energy coursing through the meridians to lay eggs, which would eventually hatch and then could be implanted to other bodies. The child Gu would also find its way to the heart of its new host, but unlike its mother instead of feeding on the spiritual energy it would go dormant. The user of the Mother Gu could send signals to the child Gu and control it to attack its host's heart, ultimately gaining control over the host's life.

Alexander was familiar with the Gu, and thus naturally knew effective ways to deal with it. Removing both the Mother and child Gu had to be done carefully, as any damage to the meridians was extremely difficult to heal. That's why the first thing Alexander did was cripple Greg, so that he would lose control over the Mother Gu. Then, before the Mother Gu had a chance to do anything Alexander pierced its body with the acupuncture needles and channeled his own spiritual energy through them to gain control of the Mother Gu.

At this point he slowed down, as he could not afford to be careless, and commanded the Mother Gu to remove the child Gu from his body. The Mother Gu resisted for a bit, as it was unfamiliar with this new spiritual energy, but eventually sensing a threat to its life the Gu gave in. Alexander felt the child Gu in his body making its way to his skin. The time was too short and it had not yet reached Alexander's heart, which made the process simpler. Finally, from near his stomach it broke through his skin and fell out, wriggling on the ground. Alexander gave it a disgusted look before burning it!

Finally free from danger, Alexander removed the acupuncture needles from Greg and turned to look towards Helen. By now, she had calmed down a lot and she only looked towards her two friends with sadness in her eyes.

"I believe we were in the middle of a conversation," Alexander said, his tone calm and casual as if he had not just crippled one of his oldest friends and then left him on the ground to die.

"You asked me what my role was in this," Helen said, strangely quite calm herself. "To be honest, I don't know what they wanted, but I can speculate."

"By 'they' you mean your family? Was it your parents?"

"I don't know," she said forlornly. "I received instructions via the official family channels, but I cannot be sure who gave the orders. I guess that was a contingency, in case things don't go according to plan. In fact, I think they depended on things not going according to their plans."

"Oh, what makes you say that?"

"My only job was to poison you. There were ten poisons, called the 10 poisons of Ishkbaal. Do you know what they do?"

This question troubled Alexander slightly, as despite his extensive education he had never heard of them before. Based on his delay in answering Helen was able to guess the answer.

"They're strange. On their own, the poisons do nothing. They lay dormant in your body, potentially forever, but if all ten are combined together in the bloodstream, they all begin to act independently. All

ten have different effects, and not all are lethal. One affects the stability of your meridian, one pollutes your spiritual energy, one develops extremely painful rashes all over your body, one affects your brain, the rest I wasn't able to figure out. But I think the purpose is to confuse doctors, instead of realizing that they're ten different poisons doctors might think all these symptoms are of one. If they're able to cure the lethal effects, the other poisons will still be able to destroy your cultivation talent, making it impossible for you to ever reach a higher level. Of course, this is just my guess. They gave me next to no information, maybe everything I guessed was wrong to begin with."

"Those are bold guesses," Alexander said, admittedly alarmed by this dastardly poison. "So then, if your family didn't give you any information how were you able to speculate so much, even guessing some of the poison's effects?"

Helen smiled weakly at her friend. He was so smart in so many ways, but sometimes it was the obvious answers that eluded him.

"You know, I never resented my family," she said, looking out into the distance. "Even though it was obvious that they were raising me to use me, I knew that nothing in this world is free. Instead of the difficult life of an orphan, I lived the pampered life of a rich girl in high society. I got to cultivate with the best resources that others can only even dream of, and had experiences one can ask. In exchange, if all I had to do was marry well then I never thought it was a huge price to pay, not to mention it's not necessary that a political marriage had to be a bad one."

She looked at Alexander with tears in her eyes, but he only looked back at her calmly. He was a strange person, sometimes she would think he had a heart of steel, and other times she felt like he was the softest person on Earth. Right now before her stood his steel hearted version, but could he be blamed? His closest friends his entire life had just tried to kill him.

"I was never ungrateful, and I would have done whatever they asked of me, but when they asked me to betray my friends, how could I?" Carefully she reached out towards her hair and pulled at it. She was wearing a wig! Under her wig, her scalp was covered in red boils!

"I had to ingest the poisons to prime them. They taught me a technique that would transfer all the poison into one drop of blood, and all I needed to do was expose that drop to your skin and then you would be poisoned. But would I really need to expose you to a drop of blood? They gave me so little information, what if the method of transmission is something else? Maybe I only had to be close to you and the poison would be transmitted on its own. Since they had already decided to use me as a pawn, why did they need to tell me the truth? I couldn't take the risk, so I directly used the technique and

activated the poison. It's already been a few days, the poison has already been thoroughly absorbed by my body. I don't know what else the poison does, but I expect I don't have much longer to live."

This time, Alexander was thoroughly surprised. Zeus escaping like a coward and Greg betraying him at the first opportunity did not phase him too much, somehow deep down he expected it. But Helen...the more he looked at her, the more he suddenly started to realize that her complexion wasn't normal. He walked to her and slowly, gently raised his hand to her face. Softly, making sure not to use too much force, he brushed his thumb across her face, removing the many layers of makeup. She looked beautiful, as always, and only a small straight line revealed that beneath the beautiful façade was her deathly pale skin, like that of someone on their deathbed.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 48: Puppy Dog Love

"Why didn't you just tell me?" Alexander asked after a long silence. At this moment he was regretting his earlier confidence. He had many contingencies and plans for today, the cloaked ship that hovered above that sent out the 10 Titans was just one of them. At no point during the attack of the chase did he ever feel like he was in any real danger. He truly did feel like he was just watching a play, and was waiting for all the actors to try and attack him one by one. The Gu breaking through his skin was a surprise, but even so he handled it effortlessly. Now however, he felt lost. He had no idea what he should do.

"You were in the Minor realm when I got the orders. I had no idea about Zeus or Greg, I was only told that someone will try to attack you and that would be the best time to poison you. I guess they never assumed that I wouldn't follow their orders, since they thought I'd be too scared to leave the poison in my own body. I didn't want to take any chances, and I didn't want to live with any regrets. I've led a good and full life, I am not afraid if it ends here."

Alexander was once again left speechless. How had he not noticed his friends' peril? Why did it never occur to him that his friends could have been threatened or blackmailed in participating in his assassination?

"Ugh, puppy dog love. It really makes me nauseous," someone said, startling both Alexander and Helen. They turned to see a short girl with blonde hair standing behind them. She was wearing a mask so her identity was hidden, but Alexander recognized her as the mysterious girl from the Minor realm.

"Here," she said, throwing a briefcase towards Alexander. "I've already taken one of the keys, so we can be considered even. If you use the other key, you can take your friend somewhere special. There should be a cure for her there. You don't need to have a dramatic farewell in public like this, it really makes

people sick." The mysterious girl sounded irritated, but her immature voice made it difficult for her listeners to take her seriously. She didn't bother waiting for Alexander's reply and turned to leave.

"Wait, how do I use the key?" Alexander asked.

"I'm not sure but you should be able to figure it out, it should not be too complicated."

"If I want to contact you in the future, how do I find you?" Alexander asked once again, hoping to receive a name. The mysterious girl paused for a moment, as if lost in thought, before giving a reply.

"My Tempest username is RussianPrincess77. You can contact me through that."

Before Alexander had any time to ask her any more questions, she ran away. Alexander noticed that her cultivation level had also reached the Foundation realm.

"Who was that?" Helen asked, her voice unusually strained, but Alexander ignored her.

He opened up the briefcase and took out the remaining key. He held it in his hand, and felt a familiar temptation. He hesitated, should he trust the words of the mysterious RussianPrincess77? But the hesitation lasted only a few moments. Alexander took Helens hand but before he could do anything else, as if sensing Alexander's intention to use the key it broke. There was a golden flash and the two kids disappeared, leaving a semiconscious Greg still out on the street.

It may have seemed like Lex was wasting time when he was in a serious predicament, but from the moment he'd decided to somehow get Hugo to exit his room and into the gift shop only an hour had passed. His bath had been warm and relaxing, something he needed to calm himself down so that he didn't take any drastic decisions. The more precarious his situation, the calmer he needed to be.

He had gotten redressed and was just about to exit the Inn to go smoke, but to his much welcome surprise two new guests appeared at the Inn! Ensuring that he looked fine, Lex teleported to the gate to welcome his guests.

Two teenagers stood at the entrance holding hands, bewildered as they looked around at their new surroundings.

The boy was tall and handsome, and even in his surprised state gave off an aura of self confidence. The girl was once beautiful as well, but with the power of the Inn Lex could clearly see that she had been badly disfigured by various rashes all over her body. Ignoring their appearances Lex quickly checked their details.

Name: Alexander Morrison

Power Level: Foundation realm (initial)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: Not yet available

Name: Helen Sigmund

Power Level: Qi Training (7th step)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: Not yet available

"Welcome guests, to the Midnight Inn," he said warmly. "The universe's foremost establishment for rest, recovery and anything else you may desire. I am the Innkeeper, your host."

Wasting no time, Alexander said, "My friend has been poisoned and I was told that you have a way of curing her. Is that true?"

'Told?' Lex thought curiously. But instead of pondering on it, Lex turned towards Helen and focused. Normally a guest would have to enter the Recovery Room for him to see a detailed report on their health, but ultimately the Inn was his and if he focused on a guest he could still view their condition.

Name: Helen Sigmund

Condition:

Several poisons absorbed in the bloodstream

Severe rashes all over body

Slight bruising

Report:

Several poisons have affected the patient's system, but the potency of the poisons is not strong. Can be healed with Recover Pod or Botlam Dew.

"Indeed, such a simple request is easily taken care of. You can choose one of two treatments. We have a remedy called Botlam Dew for 200MP, if given to your friend it can easily resolve the issue in a few hours. The other treatment is to take your friend to the Recovery Pod, which will allow the body to naturally overcome the poison. This method is slower and more expensive at 250MP, but it will allow her body to gain a natural immunity to such poisons."

"We'll use the Recovery Pod," Alexander said decisively, not giving Helen a chance to say anything. From his pocket he withdrew a black credit card and handed it to Lex. "You can charge all our expenses on this."

Sensing the young man's urgency, Lex smiled and waved his hand, teleporting the three to the Recovery Room.

"Please lie down on the table, the treatment will begin shortly."

Helen gave Alexander a meaningful look before lying down in the Recovery Pod. The recovery started and Lex felt the sweet, sweet exhilaration of earning some MP. But from the way Alexander didn't seem to care at all about the price, Lex had the sneaking suspicion that he could earn more. He had to play his cards right. For now he didn't say anything, letting Alexander watch as the Recovery Pod began its work, though there really wasn't much that could be seen from the outside. The Recovery Pod pushed the body's ability to heal, so all the work that was being done was internal and would take a while.

Eventually, when he realized that all he could do now was wait, Alexander stepped away from the Recovery Pod and for the first time took a good look at his surroundings. The other Recovery Pod quickly caught his eye, and when he saw who was inside he was startled.

"Is that Marlo? Is he here as well?"

"Oh, do you recognize him?" said Lex, stepping towards the normally sized man. It occurred to him that Marlo looked very different from his normal state, it was unusual for anyone to recognize him.

"Yes, he used to be my teacher once. What happened to him?"

Lex smiled and said, "If you stay here a while, you can ask him yourself when he recovers. It would be rude of me to divulge our guests' affairs."

Alexander nodded, as if what Lex said made sense. He completely did not realize that Lex had already begun his plans to make Alexander a long term guest at the Inn.