

Innkeeper 471

The Innkeeper

Chapter 471: Talented group

"What about you? Been busy lately? How many girlfriends have you run through by now?" Lex asked casually, trying to divert the topic of conversation from himself.

"I uhh... still have the same girlfriend. I'll introduce you to her," he said awkwardly. Lex could not help but notice how he loosened up his color as he said that, his eyes darting into the distance as his thoughts wandered. Oh? Was there some gossip here? Velma would surely be interested in this.

Silently, he betrayed his friend as he told Mary to inform Velma about this.

"We can talk more about that later," Larry quickly said the moment he snapped free from his thoughts. "Instead, I should ask, are you busy? I have a couple of things I want to talk to you about."

"Not that busy. I was looking for a spiritual treasure to train my spirit sense, but I haven't been able to find one so far."

"Ah yes, I remember going through that hassle. What you-" Larry suddenly paused, and then looked at Lex with a look of genuine shock. "Wait, you... you've reached the Golden core realm?"

Lex shrugged as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world.

"Yeah, I did. I don't know why you're surprised if you were able to reach it even quicker than I."

"I... no, but you..."

Larry shook his head and looked at Lex as if he was seeing the man for the first time. Although he always held Lex in high regard, for he knew he wasn't simple, this was taking things a bit beyond just that. He knew how valuable his own secret was to help him grow so quickly. The fact that Lex could keep up,

even if he was a bit slower, meant that his secrets were also probably not too lacking when compared to his own.

Larry's wide grin promptly returned as he wrapped his arm around Lex's neck.

"This is a reason to celebrate," he said, "and celebrate we shall by finally getting you a girl!"

Lex elbowed the man and pushed him away. The man literally never thought about anything other than girls. Lex thought to tease him about it, since last he recalled he was actually not so skilled at flirting, but it seemed he had managed to maintain a relationship for a while. As a young bachelor, Lex really felt like elbowing him a little harder. His strange metallic body should be able to tolerate it, right?

"Haha alright, alright. Forget about the treasure, I'll get you a good one later. I have a guy who handles simple things like this. Instead, let me introduce you to some people. This is Rafael, Marlo's son."

Lex put on a surprised expression as he turned to look at the mature man. He was already in the Qi training realm once again, and making steady progress. As a man in his mid-30s, he looked the oldest of the bunch and definitely stood out, but at the rate his cultivation was going it wouldn't be long before he regained his youthful demeanor.

"It's a pleasure," said Lex as he shook the man's hand.

"Likewise," replied Rafael as he tried to recall if he'd heard of Lex from his memories of the future. After all, such a young Golden core cultivator, especially one from earth, was someone who should have had a lot of fame. But he was drawing a blank.

Little did he know, in the version of the future he knew, since Marlo never trained Lex, his experience at Vegus Minima had been so bad, Lex had decided to slow down the growth of the Inn to a dead stall. It took him many years to reach the Golden core in that timeline due to his caution and lack of opportunities.

"This spry young lad here is Anakin, and this is Noman," he said, continuing with the introductions. "And finally, this brooding fellow is Zouta. Or Souta. Or something like that. I've given up on trying to pronounce his name, I hope you have better luck."

Lex nodded at each of the three guys separately, paying special attention to each of them. Noman was the source of the danger he was detecting, and he could see something odd happening around him from his left eye, but see nothing else. With Anakin he couldn't see anything worthy of notice, but his soul sense brushed past him - mostly because he still couldn't control it - and that's when Lex noticed two souls within the man's body. That only left Souta, the system wielder. All of them, alongside Rafael, who had a mysterious treasure inside his heart, formed a strange group of people with unbelievable secrets.

Lex could not help but think that if this were a novel, each one of them would be worthy of being either an antagonist or protagonist in the series.

"Let's find somewhere more private to talk," said Larry.

Lex, who was keen on trying to understand what objective such a collection of talented young men could have, took the opportunity to test out the warning from his intuition about being truthful.

"I have a cabin on the Midnight train. We can talk there," he said, wearing an expression of showing off as he looked at Larry.

Before the other could respond, however, a whisper interrupted him, saying, "he's lying."

Although it was only a whisper, and they were on a crowded street, as cultivators so close to the source, they all heard him.

Lex wore an awkward expression as an unknown light flashed through his eyes.

"What I mean is, by the time we reach the station, I can arrange to get a cabin. Don't worry, it's just a minor cost to me and I've always wanted to try it, anyway."

Lex looked at Noman as he spoke, but the other did not show any concern, as if the explanation was not for him.

Lex, on the other hand, was thinking about the implications of what just happened. Fortunately, his intrigue did not need to be disguised. Once they reached the cabin, Lex could directly ask Larry.

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Chapter 472: Spiel

Lex looked outside the cabin window as the train finally began to move from the station, admiring the beautiful view. The first of purple crystals was a particularly enchanting sight, and stood out for miles around.

"Hey I can't believe you pulled this off," said Larry, not bothering to hide his amazement in his voice. The fact that an entire carriage had to be rented at a time, which was extremely expensive, was not even the start of it. The train was extremely popular and there was always a line, ready to book any carriages the moment they got free. The fact that Lex had been able to book it without even being present spoke of his connections and reach.

"Your friend seemed to think I was lying," Lex said with a smirk, as if he had just proven the other wrong.

"Don't mind Noman. He wasn't targeting you, he just takes everything very literally. Speaking of the devil, come on, let's sit with the others. There are a few things we have to discuss and I think you'll find them interesting."

Lex nodded and followed Larry into another, particularly lavishly furnished cabin and took a seat. There was no table at which they could all sit, but due to the size of the cabin, even sitting in individual sofas, they were all near enough to hold a normal conversation.

"Gents, I'd like to introduce you to Lex Williams, a good friend of mine. He's a reliable fellow, and quite resourceful, as you've probably noticed. Lex, the reason we're all here, and the reason I've even called you here, is because of an issue that I've been facing."

The jolly look on Larry's face finally disappeared, and even his tone turned cold.

"I'm sure you remember that I'm being hunted down on earth. To be honest, a part of me just wanted to give up, and move permanently to the Inn. I had no hope of finding my family, I've just come to accept that they're probably dead. Not to mention, I've heard if I increase my Inn privilege level enough, I can

teleport to another planet. I was thinking of getting out forever. But it seems that whoever is after me... is not content to leave things alone.

"They sent assassins after me... to the Inn as well! Thanks to Noman, I was able to identify the assassins and... take care of things. Well, I took care of one. Souta here used to work with the one I took care of."

Lex looked at the man with an eyebrow raised.

"What happened, you switched sides? And if you don't mind me asking, how did you identify the assassins?"

Lex asked Souta and Noman the questions directly. This was the freedom using his own identity allowed him that being the Innkeeper restricted him from. As an all knowing and wise Innkeeper, it was inappropriate to ask so many questions so easily.

"My previous master was a corrupt man. I was forced to listen to him for... certain reasons, but once he died, I was freed from my restraints."

Lex's left eye could not pick up any signs of a system on Souta at all, and though Lex tried to use his soul sense on him, it was difficult to control it for now.

"I didn't do much," Noman answered simply. "I was just passing by when they approached Larry for the first time and happened to notice they were lying to him. Still, I didn't do much. I might have pointed out their lie, I don't remember really."

"The issue is not with the assassins," Larry continued. "The issue is that we still don't know who is after me. Rafael even used his father's contacts to see if it was someone from the Council of New Order. But we were not able to find anything. Even the councilmen who did act against me seemed to be doing it on someone else's behalf."

Something suddenly clicked in Lex's mind, and he summoned a file that Velma had once given him about the prisoners who were secretly controlling earth. He wasn't worried that anyone would wonder where he got the file from, for he had a bangle with a hidden space inside of it now. It could explain everything.

"I might have an idea of who might be behind it," Lex cut Larry off, as he handed him the file, and explained how every major conflict on earth, including the one orchestrated by the Council of New Order, was actually being masterminded by others.

While Lex was explaining, everyone kept looking at Noman from time to time, as if waiting for him to spot a lie, but it never came. Larry hid his emotions well, but the focus with which he was reading the file spoke much about his mental state.

Most curiously, Lex noticed, that Larry was the only one to have the expected reaction. Everyone else...

"Lex, Lex, Lex, I feel like I'm meeting a long lost brother," said Anakin as he eyed the man greedily. "Larry said you're resourceful but I didn't expect you to be on a level entirely of your own. Let me introduce myself properly a little, while Larry reads the file. The name is Anakin, as you already know. But what you don't know is that I'm a businessman. In fact, I'm not just a businessman, I'm a man with an extraordinary vision, and ideas that could make us wealthy beyond our wildest dreams. The only reason I haven't succeeded already is because I need someone resourceful, who can help me out a little. I have a few, minor, completely irrelevant inconveniences stopping me. But I have a feeling that with your help, my operation can really take off. What do you say? Are you interested in working with me? If you don't trust my word, you can ask Larry to vouch for me. I'm an honest man, just trying to make an honest living."

Before Anakin could continue his spiel, an earth-shattering clap of thunder roared across the Inn, and a flash of lightning struck!

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Chapter 473: Tribulation

Everyone in the room was greatly startled by the noise, Lex included, let alone the red eyed Larry who had been reading the file Lex gave him. Abruptly everyone got up and ran to the window to see if they could identify what had caused the commotion. Even if they identified the sound as thunder, they couldn't be sure since too many unusual things happened at the Inn.

Lex was a step slower and allowed everyone to crowd the window in front of him, for in his mind he was already scanning the Inn and investigating the cause. Something genuinely strange was happening, as the weather at the Inn had escaped Lex's control for the first time.

A dark cloud had formed over a remote area of the Inn, and seemed to be going larger at a steady pace. Lex did not fail to notice that right underneath it was one of the more lavish abodes he had created.

Among the types of accommodation the Inn offered usually were the normal room, small house, large house, courtyard, and finally the small village. Although he imagined that anyone in retreat might want to do it alone, he did not leave the decision up to himself, and designed abodes to accommodate more people as well. The largest abodes he made were the size of a small village.

The abode that had been subjected to the lightning strike was one such abode, and it was occupied by a Devil who was currently breaking through from the Nascent realm. The Devil was not surprised by the lightning strike, and it had not prevented his breakthrough at all.

Lex did even get an opportunity to wonder why this was happening when the familiar sound of a system notification rang in his ears.

New Quest: A guest is undergoing a realm breakthrough and is experiencing his first tribulation. As a universal establishment, the Inn is a perfect location to undergo a tribulation for those searching for a safe environment. Add facilities to the Inn centered around undergoing tribulations.

i) Add a Lightning tempering room (New room unlocked)

ii) Add a Flame tempering room (New room unlocked)

iii) Create a Tribulation room (New feature unlocked)

Quest Reward: Subject to performance

Lex was reading the notification, but as a result of new multitasking ability, he could easily focus on multiple things at the same time. This meant he could continue to hold a conversation with a person, giving them full and sufficient attention, without being distracted from his other task.

Given that, he did not lose out on the opportunity to tease Anakin.

"Go ahead, tell me you're an honest man one more time, and let's see if lightning strikes again."

Lex's casual remark cut through the tension in the room, and while Anakin was left with his mouth hung open, unsure of how to reply, the others looked at him with interest. His cavalier attitude indicated he knew what was going on.

"I don't know if he's honest, but he never lies," said Noman as he returned to his seat. It was Lex's calm attitude that made something click in his mind, allowing him to realize what was happening. Truthfully speaking, with his background, it was embarrassing that he wasn't the first to realize what was happening.

"What was that?" asked Anakin, wanting to divert the topic of conversation from himself.

"It's a lightning tribulation," Noman answered casually. "It's rare to see one, actually. But I guess the aid to everyone cultivation brought by the star rank increase pushed whoever is going through it over the edge. Chances are, we'll see a lot more of them."

"What's a lightning tribulation?" Anakin asked, returning to his seat. There was another flash of light during this time, but no sound this time. That was because Lex had added a sound insulation feature to every single abode at the Inn. If more tribulations would come, the noise would make it impossible for anyone to go about peacefully.

"I don't know in too much detail, since it's not relevant to me yet. But basically, in all the realms after Nascent, trying to break through to a higher realm causes a tribulation. Lightning and fire tribulations are the ones I know about, but I know that they're supposed to be more on higher levels. What those are... I have no idea, though I heard a rumor that some extinct races have become a part of the tribulations. What that means... I have no idea."

"If it's nothing to be alarmed about, can we focus on this?" Larry said, holding out the file. He had recomposed himself by now, though anyone could tell he was holding himself back. Not waiting for anyone to ask, he briefly described everything he had read about how all wars and conflicts on Earth were games to a few people who were being held as prisoners on Earth.

Other than Noman, who had never been to Earth, everyone was extremely shocked by what they heard. Even the cool and composed Rafael was having drastic mood swings, though he managed to keep his cool. Anakin wasn't too aggrieved personally, but even he realized that this was not a small matter.

"How did you even find out all of this?" Rafael asked, looking at Lex.

Lex, though, was not pressured by the attention and only smirked. "I have reliable sources, though if you don't believe me, that's your right. Honestly, I wouldn't have shared this with you all to begin with if I didn't think this matter had something to do with whoever is hunting Larry. It has to be one of the 'prisoners', if not the same ones, causing all the problems. The question is, what can we do about this?"

Everyone turned to look at Noman, who only nodded and said nothing else. It seemed... Lex was telling the truth.

"There are a lot of things you may or may not know, so I'll speed you through it. Earth... and the rest of the solar system are considered property of some... people or organization. I'm not sure who. They've been using the fact that Earth lacks spiritual energy to use it as a prison. I tried to pass this information to them through the Council of New order, but it seems to me like they haven't done anything to address the situation. As much as I want to just go to Earth and kill the people responsible, I don't know if we'll be able to handle the repercussions if the people who 'own' Earth take offense. One possible solution I thought of was if we invited the Jotun Empire over to Earth. They seem to have an interest in expanding, and if they could do for Earth what they did for the Vegus planets, we'd be much better off."

"It's a good plan," said Rafael with a disappointed voice. "But it won't work. As for how I know... I have sources of my own as well."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 474: Room design

"What do you mean?" Lex asked with a frown. He didn't want to take any drastic actions on Earth, nor did he want to be responsible for any of them doing anything drastic either. The reason he had shared this information was because he was sure he had a handle on things. Although killing a few prisoners on Earth was not hard, he did not want to find out how the organization that had been using Earth as a prison would react to such hostility.

After all, even if he could retreat to the Inn, not everyone could. An organization that had been capable of interstellar travel, and who had been using earth as a prison should not be weak at all. Let alone, he did not forget that even Bastet and Falak, two Demi-Daolords, were prisoners on Earth as well. Things being handled peacefully or through negotiations was the best idea.

"I mean... the Jotun Empire will not interfere with anything on Earth. As for how or why I know this, I can't say."

Memories from his past life flashed in his mind. Things had changed a lot when spiritual energy returned to Earth, and most of them were not in a good way.

Once again everyone looked at Noman, who only shrugged.

Lex took this opportunity to wear an irritated expression and ask, "why do you all keep looking at him?"

An awkward silence filled the room as everyone looked at Noman. Everyone here had shared secrets with one another, though Noman's was the only one everyone remembered. Still, that experience had built a bond of trust amongst them, and it did not feel right to just include Lex inside it without him sharing his secret as well.

"I did not expect this conversation to reach this point so quickly," said Anakin, who was once again wearing a sly smile. "The Inn has this little room called the Chamber of Secrets. Are you familiar with it, Lex?"

The question was a rhetorical one for he did not expect Lex to actually know, and was once again about to enter his usual persuasive speech when Lex nodded firmly.

"Oh, um, yes, perfect then, that saves me from having to explain it to you," he said, the disappointment in his voice evident. "Well, the point being, we all here have some... personal matters we'd like to keep personal. There are certain things we'd like to keep that way, but if we can come to an agreement, we won't mind continuing this conversation inside the chamber. That way, everyone's secrets stay safe and we can move the conversation forward."

Lex did not reply immediately, and continued to look at Anakin with a scrutinizing gaze. There was definitely more than met the eye about this group, and curiosity about their secrets had already occupied a corner of Lex's mind. This was also an excellent way to learn more about Souta, as well as Noman. The issue about Earth... well, if that was a matter that could be resolved as well then he had nothing to lose by joining them. Besides, he knew exactly what 'secret' to share.

"Alright," Lex said finally, and leaned back on his sofa. A silence filled the room as everyone waited. As it happened, one of the train stations happened to be near the point where the chamber of secrets was located, so all they had to do now was wait till then.

Lex, however, was more occupied than he seemed as he was focused on his latest quest.

Lightning tempering room

A room in which cultivators can temper their body, spirit or soul with varying levels of lightning!

Disclaimer: Even the lowest level of lightning is meant for Nascent level cultivators and can cause injuries or even death if not adequately prepared.

Disclaimer: Due to limited system functionality, any upgrade to the Lightning tempering room will require the Innkeeper to manually provide new types of lightning before upgrade becomes available.

Fire tempering room

A room in which cultivators can temper their body, spirit or soul with varying levels of fire.

Disclaimer: Even the lowest level fire is meant for Nascent level cultivators and can cause injuries or even death if not adequately prepared.

Disclaimer: Due to limited system functionality, any upgrade to the Fire tempering room will require the Innkeeper to manually provide new types of fire before upgrade becomes available.

Both the new tempering rooms were meant specifically for Nascent realm cultivators, and cost a hefty 15,000MP per hour to use. Lex decided to set the price at 20,000MP per hour to use them, and would require the guest to have a prestige level of at least 2.

The matter relating to upgrading them was something that would require his personal effort, but it was a matter for the future, since he would need to develop a deeper understanding of their limits before working on that.

Instead, the remainder of his focus was on the third room.

Tribulation room

A room guests can rent while undergoing tribulations.

That one simple sentence was the entire description for this room, mainly because there was a new feature he had unlocked as well which he was supposed to use on the Tribulation room.

Room design

Using the various existing abilities and features of the Inn, alongside available upgrades, the Innkeeper can design a new kind of room to fulfill certain requirements for guests that the Inn needs but is lacking. The newly designed room will become a part of the system and will operate based on the conditions set by the Innkeeper. The expense and functionality of the room will be determined based on the used features. All upgrades to designed rooms will require the Innkeeper to manually bring in required resources and outline additional features.

This... this was one of the most amazing features Lex had received so far. To an extent, he was already doing this with various rooms and buildings that he created then retrofitted with formations. But when compared to rooms provided directly by the system, they had always been lacking. Now though... he could really take things a step further.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 475: Watching children play

Although it did not seem like it, as Lex walked quietly with the group towards the Chamber of Secrets, he was actually doing multiple things at the same time. A part of him was paying attention to the ongoing lightning tribulation. The devil... to be entirely honest, he had started the tribulation with a convincing performance, but the longer it went on, the worse his condition became. Parts of his body were already charred and smoking, and he had given up his humanoid form to revert to his true devil form.

Lex expected that the form would be quite gruesome, but it was far from the truth. While the large body with wings and horns and red skin looked mighty intimidating, it also looked regal and authoritative - not at all the vile, disgusting appearance Lex had been expecting.

But whatever the case, if there was to be a fire tribulation following the lightning one, he did not know how the devil planned on surviving with its existing wounds.

Another part of him was entirely focused on the new room design feature. It was incredible and versatile, but also tricky. Lex tried to create a training room with the additional qualities of the simple recovery room, which sped up the body's natural healing. He was only experimenting and wanted to see how it would turn out. Moreover, it wasn't a bad idea in case someone was training a technique that would constantly push them to the limit.

Lex achieved what he wanted. But because he did not calibrate it properly, or take into consideration how the various features of the Inn had or lacked synergy with one another, the room he created cost an incredible 34,000 MP per hour!

At that point, the price of the room was far beyond the reach of the target audience, and it became impractical and pointless. But that was fine. After all, he was experimenting for the sake of learning how to use it, anyway. He would slowly work out how best to join the unique features of the Inn together.

The remainder of his focus had been on the simple task of devising a loophole to prevent the chamber of secrets from erasing his memory somehow. His leading strategy was to have Mary hear everything and inform him later on. Yet Mary herself did not think it would work.

"Like I told you, since the description of the chamber specifically said that not even the Innkeeper would be able to spy on the secrets stored in there, it won't be so simple to work around it. There's a very high chance the system will block off my connection to you the moment you enter."

"That's ridiculous. Why would the system block you out? It's never done that before."

"It's a matter of integrity. Since the system itself focused on maintaining secrecy, then keeping the secret is a part of the Inns prestige."

"Let's just see."

In the end, there was not much he could do if the system had accounted for loopholes. When the group arrived, they found the chamber deserted, as usual, and did not hesitate to enter.

While Lex did not feel much of a change, besides the point that his connection to Mary, and his connection to the system, were put under restrictions, the rest of the group trembled once they entered.

According to the agreement they had set, they would not recall any of the secrets they shared with one another, unless all relevant members were within the chamber at the same time.

Larry and Souta had not revealed their secrets completely, but they had shared enough to gain the attention of the group. Even then, how could they have compared with the likes of Noman and Rafael? Noman, whose ability knew no limitations, could prove to be extremely valuable. Trusting the words of others was one of the most difficult things to do, but what if they had a perpetual truth detector besides them? How would anyone trick them?

Then came Rafael. Although his experiences were limited to Earth, he had lived through the future and knew many of the incoming trials the planet would face.

Anakin was suddenly reminded of the most important reason he had been trying to make so much money lately. He wanted to earn enough to use the prestige ability to escape Earth! He had only a few years before the first disaster struck!

Lex noticed the odd behavior and hesitation the group showed and turned to look at them. Most of the group was looking at Rafael while the man in question was completely nonchalant and took a seat.

"Before we begin," Rafael said, looking at Lex. "We need to establish an agreement first. Everyone here has shared something valuable with the group. It was not out of charity and no one was coerced into it. Everyone had something to gain, and so we shared our secrets with one another for mutual benefit. At the same time, the moment we leave the chamber, it withdraws information about each other's secrets from our minds, protecting everyone."

He paused again as everyone sat. He could not say for others, but he at least had an agenda for cooperating with a group of such uniquely talented people. Too much had changed on Earth from his memories, but those changes were mostly a result of changes on the planet itself. The external threats it faced were still coming, and not only did he need to strengthen himself for that, he needed powerful allies. But being greedy for skilled people could also endanger the group that had already been composed. As such, it was his duty to ensure that the group was not needlessly endangered.

"You do not have to share your secrets if they are not related, but for us to trust you, you have to reveal relevant details, at least. Moreover, I'd like to know what exactly you want. Larry has spoken highly of you, and you have shown your worth, so if you're here to help out Larry, that's one thing. But if that's the case, the way I see it, you don't really need to know our secrets. Just the fact that Larry trusts us should be enough."

Countless thoughts ran through the group's mind as they heard Rafael's question. Everyone of them, except Noman, had plans of their own, so they didn't mind the fact that Rafael instinctively used them to build the group's authority. If Lex ended up joining them, it would start them out at an advantage.

Lex, however, felt like laughing. Instead of feeling interrogated, it felt like he was watching children playing a game. What did he want? Everything they could offer, of course! He resisted the urge to crack his knuckles and smile. It was time to learn all their secrets. He was a busy man - he had others to scheme against as well.

Outside the chamber, the devil that had been undergoing the tribulation died, unable to survive it. The ash his body turned into has not even fallen to the floor before another two tribulations began at the Inn. The constant flashing of lightning made the Inn seem like a disco.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 476: The brains of the operation

"What do I want?" Lex asked in an amused tone. He had to be careful with his wording, for he couldn't say they had nothing he wanted, for that would be a lie! He thought that he could avoid it by asking them a question instead, for example, 'do you even have something I could want?'. Yet while technically

it was a question, it insinuated that they had nothing he wanted. Since the meaning being communicated was false, Noman would be able to detect it, so Lex's intuition quickly shut him down.

This was not something he could get through with half truths and hidden meanings.

"I want many things, but will you give them to me just because I want them? My priority right now is to help Larry, but at the same time, resolve this issue with earth! Whoever has been using it as a prison couldn't care less about how the prisoners are literally using the people of the planet like characters in a video game. Originally, I was planning on getting the Empire to help deal with them in exchange for taking control of the planet, but according to you, that won't work.

"So, for now, what I want is to focus on is why the Empire is not a good solution for Earth. As for anything else I might want from you... well, why don't you tell me first what you can offer to begin with?"

He smiled and looked at Rafael as he waited for the man to contemplate what he said. He could tell that, despite the fact that he had spent most of his life in a coma, he was a lot more mature than the rest. Which meant that convincing him would be the most difficult part. Of course, that was only relatively speaking. To Lex, it was all too simple to throw him off his game.

He carefully observed Rafael, and just as he saw a change in the man's eyes, indicating that he was about to speak, Lex looked away and turned to Noman.

"Every time I say something, the group looks to you for confirmation. If I had to guess, you can tell whether a person is lying. Or at least something along those lines. Am I right?"

Before he had a chance to respond, Lex looked at Souta.

"You confuse me the most. You were previously working with the assassin who was targeting Larry, but now you're hanging out with Larry. I guess Noman already confirmed that you're not still after Larry, or that you never had any negative intentions towards him, so everyone is okay with you sticking around. But why do you want to stick around in the first place, anyway? Don't you have anything you would rather do? I recall you saying you were 'forced' to obey your master previously. Don't tell me you're doing something cliché like following Larry now because he defeated your master?"

Lex shook his head as if he said something completely impractical, but anything was possible when it came to systems.

He then turned to Anakin. "I don't even need to guess with you. You're a businessman, right? You're just in it to make money. I guess you find this group very profitable."

Lastly, he looked back at Rafael, and this time, he spoke slowly and carefully.

"To be honest, I already know a lot about you. You spent the last dozen or so years asleep, right? It's a miracle that you're alive, let alone kicking and cultivating. I'm really genuinely curious about your sources for the Empire. They must be very impressive."

Lex smiled as he waited for them to respond to his accusations. He had made sure to keep a friendly tone - he didn't want to sound too antagonizing so as to draw hostility. Yet at the same time, by having their capabilities belittled and being goaded by him, they would feel the urge to let him know he was wrong by showing off. He was counting on the pride and inexperience of youth to force them into action. After all, even though Rafael was in his late 30s, the amount of time he had been awake was around the same as the rest.

Yet while the rest immediately reacted to what he said, especially Anakin, Rafael stayed perfectly calm. In fact, the way he looked at Lex subtly changed, as if he was analyzing him.

"I'll have you know I'm the brains of this operation," Anakin declared with a snort. "If it weren't for me bringing everyone to the chamber, and persuading them, all of them would still be glaring at one another like teenagers in a feud. And if you really want to know what's so special about me, just sign the agreement and I'll tell you."

A screen suddenly appeared in front of Lex, asking him if he agreed to the terms of the agreement. Basically, all it said was that once he left the chamber, he would forget all sensitive information about the rest. In the future, even if he returned to the chamber, he would not be able to recall it unless the relevant person was in the chamber with him. This was the agreement everyone had signed.

Even with Noman, though they all remembered he could determine if a person was lying, they forgot the exact details of how it happened. Lex raised an eyebrow, and then accepted. This was going to happen, anyway. He also didn't doubt that the rest would share their secrets with him, eventually. The

real reason he had goaded them... was to get the spotlight off of him! It seemed to have worked, though Rafael was still observing him oddly intently.

"Hah! I'll have you know, I have a grandpa who appears in my dreams and teaches me to wield the power of the dark side!" Anakin vanished from right in front of him. Lex was startled, because even the sight from his left eye did not reveal where he was!

A golf cart, larger than normal ones, pulled up in front of the Midnight manor, and five men disembarked. They remained silent and quickly fell into formation, with one leading and four following closely behind.

Though they did not put their auras on display, whether it was humans, devils, beasts or other creatures, all could not help and turned to look at them. The man in the lead was too stunningly handsome, and the four behind him each moved with a charm solely of their own.

Together, they bore the makings of a hugely successful boy band.

Suddenly, one of the guests at the manor, a soldier from Ragnar's regiment, recognized the man in the lead and went completely pale and stiff. It was only complete instinct that made the soldier give his most rigid salute as he hoarsely yelled, "Emperor Jotun, your majesty!"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 477: Curse

The man who was addressed as Emperor only slightly nodded to the soldier and kept on walking. The four men behind him didn't slow their pace either, though one of them, a tall, young looking man with dark hair and brown eyes, looked at the soldier for a brief moment.

"Why did that soldier recognize me, William?" the Emperor asked casually using his spiritual sense.

"Lieutenant Dan is a child from the Aragoni noble family. 3000 years ago you met one of their ancestors at a formal event and took a photo with them. It is likely framed in their family home. Another likely

reason is that he is from the regiment led by General Ragnar, someone from Serafol's faction. Not only is Ragnar extremely loyal to the royal family, his growth record is phenomenal and he has shown excellent potential. Although he does not know it, his name has been entered into the potential candidates to marry into the royal family."

Jotun merely nodded and kept on walking. Under the instructions of the Henali he had arrived at the Midnight Inn to have a meeting with the Innkeeper. Yet he was informed the Innkeeper was currently occupied and they would have to wait.

Jotun didn't mind. This seemed like an interesting place, with multiple tribulations happening at the same time. He could take this time to relax.

He walked into the bar inside the Midnight manor to find it mostly occupied by some group. The Emperor ordered a drink and sat in the corner to allow himself to relax. Yet before he could do so, he heard an interesting conversation.

"Truck-kun? A serial killer who can travel across multiple galaxies?"

Interest flickered in his eyes as he continued to listen.

Lex continued to look at where Anakin had been when he disappeared, but found nothing. While he hadn't tested out finding him with his spirit sense, just the fact that Anakin could hide from his eyes either meant that he overestimated his eyes' capabilities, or that Anakin's abilities were more formidable than they appeared. Especially when one considered that he was just in the Qi training realm!

"Not bad," Lex commented, and looked to his left. Though Lex could not see him, his intuition was still working. If Anakin wanted to prank him, it would take a lot more than just that.

Anakin was so startled when Lex looked at his invisible self directly in the eyes that his powers failed.

The prankster quickly regained composure when he realized that he had become visible again, and returned to his seat as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"You're right," Noman spoke as well as he sheepishly scratched the back of his head. "I can tell when someone is lying. I can even tell if what I'm reading is a lie. Even if someone tells the truth, but in a deceptive way, so that the understanding I get is false, I can tell it's a lie. Moreover, my ability has nothing to do with cultivation level. I've never met someone, regardless of how weak or strong they were, who was able to lie to me successfully."

'That's not true,' Lex mimicked him in his mind in amusement. Still, he was observing him closely. That ability... was very impressive, and if it was not limited by cultivation realms... Well, Lex was tempted to hire him as an employee of the Inn right away!

"Not that I'm doubting you or anything, but do you mind if I test it out?" Lx asked as he focused more closely at the waves being emitted from Noman.

"Sure, go ahead."

"My name is Lex," he said and observed if there was any reaction. Nothing unusual happened, and Noman didn't do anything either.

"I am 27 years old," Lex said once again. He did not want to use obvious lies, and planned on mixing a few truths into his statements. Once or twice he might mention an absurd lie just to see if Noman himself identifying the lie made any difference on his ability, and what effect it had on those waves.

As he suspected, from the moment he started speaking there was a disruption in the waves. From being colorless, they gained a red color which, then, was absorbed into Noman's body. The moment the color was completely absorbed, Noman whispered, "he's lying."

Lex accepted the answer and was about to continue when something even stranger happened. Noman looked up at Lex and said aloud, "you're lying."

Lex frowned, and said a few more lines. The pattern with Noam repeating himself twice continued. Even the rest of the group began to notice that something unusual was going on, and the confused looks on their faces told Lex that this wasn't something they were aware of.

"Do you mind if I try something?" Lex asked.

"Go ahead," Noman answered confidently. No one had been able to disrupt his ability before and he was confident it would continue that way.

Lex walked up to him and said, "I'm actually bald."

The red colored waves appeared once again, but this time Lex quickly moved his hand right above Noman's head, blocking the waves. Something absurd happened.

The waves passed through Lex's hand, though he felt a strange resistance, but the red color remained behind.

This time, Noman did not unconsciously whisper out that Lex was lying, but he did confidently look at Lex and declared his lie - completely ignoring the fact that identifying such an obvious lie should not have made him proud.

But he did not get the reaction he was hoping for, as not only Lex, but the entire group was looking at him in a strange way.

Lex tried a few more, less obvious lies and the same thing happened. Lex did not know what the red color was, or why he was able to interact with it, but he did make a deduction of what was happening to Noman.

He looked at Anakin and asked, "does he always whisper when someone lies near him."

"Yes," Anakin answered, at exactly the same time as Noman who said, "no."

Lex frowned for a moment while he considered the possibilities, before he made his way back to his seat.

"Noman, before you came to the Inn, was there any chance someone was targeting you? It may have been a subtle feeling you had, or maybe you saw some hints indicating it."

"There was nothing subtle about it. There was a group of people trying to kidnap me. If I had not been delivered a golden key just in time, I would have been caught. Why do you ask?"

"Hmm, it's just as I thought," Lex said slowly. "Someone has put a curse on you. Every time your ability is used, you can't help but say it out loud. There might be other aspects to it as well. My guess is, they're using that to track you. If you had tried to hide anywhere other than the Inn, they would have found you."

Suddenly, everyone in the group had an abrupt realization. Noman wasn't an idiot or completely oblivious to his own actions, as they had assumed. Someone had cursed him.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 478: So many secrets

"A curse?" Noman repeated, startled. The scariest thing was that he could tell Lex wasn't lying. Moreover, everyone's reaction told him that they believe him too.

"Well, to be specific, I don't know if it's a curse or a technique or something, but yes someone has definitely done something to you. As for the tracking bit, that's purely my guess as well, but it makes sense. If I was kidnapping you, and came close enough to mark you, I would definitely leave some kind of tracker on you as well."

Noman frowned but relaxed just as quickly. He leaned back into his chair comfortably and said, "well I wasn't planning on leaving the Inn anytime soon, anyway. If they have the guts to try to kidnap me here, I say they should go for it."

Lex was taken aback by Nomans' cavalier attitude, but it seemed like whatever he said made sense. Since the 'curse' was not harming him, and he was not planning on returning, there was no point in

being worried. Besides, there was a very decent possibility that one day he'd be able to remove the curse on himself right from the Inn.

Lex shrugged and leaned back into his own chair. Regardless of the curse, Noman was worthy of keeping an eye on. The truth only thing was tricky, but with his intuition always reminding him to be careful of what he said around Noman, there wasn't a chance he'd forget.

The group was also taken aback by Noman's attitude, but it wasn't their place to comment.

With Anakin and Noman starting to share already, there wasn't much point in holding back. But unfortunately, not everyone was as open as the other two.

"Knowing my secret is not really relevant to anything we're doing," Souta said calmly, "but for the sake of building trust I'll share with you what I shared with the rest. For certain reasons, I had to obey Suzuki's every instruction, regardless of whether I wanted to or not. He took advantage of that to make me do many immoral acts for his own profit. I was more than happy to see him disposed of, and I did not hesitate to let them know that unless they fought him some place he couldn't call me, he would force me to participate. If that were the case, their chances of success... let's just say they were really bad."

"What about why you're still hanging around?" Lex asked, not worried that his excessive attention towards Souta would cause curiosity or suspicion. After all, the man was a former assassin. It would in fact be strange if Lex weren't wary at all.

"Not to sound too critical, but Rafael was not wrong to question my motives. I still don't understand yours, though. You have been freed of your master's control, so why are you still around?"

This time, even the cool and collected Rafael turned to look at Souta. With Noman present it was all but guaranteed that they could not lie, so while asking such a question was normally pointless, in the current situation it was a good way of ensuring no one was plotting against them.

Souta did not seem perturbed by the questioning though, and responded calmly.

"I had intentions to make amends to those that I have wronged. Anakin suggested that he knew a way that would allow me to make up for my sins. Since I lacked any ideas of my own, I decided to stick around."

Anakin nodded firmly, as if proud of his role in making Souta stay. Lex was unsatisfied with the answer, but he didn't press on. It seemed like he would have to take a more direct approach if he wished to get real answers. For now, that would have to wait.

"Before I share mine," said Rafael, once silence fell between the group and it was obvious that Lex had no more questions. "Why don't you share the source of your information first? That way, when I explain my part, everyone will have a clearer picture of the situation."

Lex looked at Rafael silently for a moment. Of the entire group, he was the one who gave Lex the most trouble. Even Noman's ability didn't put as much actual pressure on him. He did not at all behave like Lex expected. For a brief moment he wondered if someone had reincarnated in Rafael's body the way Ming Jie had reincarnated in the mountain. But he dismissed the thought the moment it entered. If he started suspecting everyone he met of something so absurd, he himself would go insane.

"My source is fairly simple," Lex said lightly, as if it wasn't really such a big secret. "Have you seen the Midnight news building? Well, if you've been inside you'd know that other than what they sell on the newsletter, you can also purchase additional information. This file is available there."

"Impossible," Rafael said, shaking his head. "If news like this was being sold so openly, everyone would know about it. I haven't been to the news building, but I'm positive they wouldn't be selling such news. At least, it would not be so simple to get one's hands on it."

Lex flashed Rafael an amused smile, and then eyed Noman. His meaning was clear. Noman had not mentioned he was lying, so clearly it meant it was the truth.

Yet Lex did not mean to leave things at that. It was clear that everyone in the group had intentions of their own with the group. Anakin wanted to make money, Larry wanted revenge, and Rafael clearly wanted something too - though he didn't know what that was yet.

Even Souta must have had some other ideas - he was sure of it.

But amongst them all, Lex was perhaps the person with the most to gain. Not only did he want to hire them at the Inn if they showed potential, he was about to use them to link his multiple identities together.

"Well of course that's not the kind of stuff they sell to the public. That kind of news is only available to the Inn's staff. Like me."

Lex summoned his Clark Kent glasses and put them on. "Let me introduce myself again. My name is Leo, and I run the Gamer's Den."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 479: Showing off

"Let me introduce myself again," said Lex, wearing a casual smile. But it was not his usual handsome face that wore the smile. Instead, the face appeared slightly more mature, with deep-set eyes and a jawline sharp enough to cut through steel. His voice also changed, becoming slightly heavier and lower.

The faint glimmer of amusement in his eyes and the teasing tone in his voice matched his new persona well. The face he wore looked like it was on the verge of causing mischief at any given moment, but at the same time, presented a trustworthy and reliable facade. He looked like the kind of person who would be forgiven even if he caused trouble all the time, just because everyone knew he never meant any harm.

Yet even if he did mean harm, what could anyone do anyway?

"My name is Leo, and I run the Gamer's Den."

From the distracted Larry, to reclining Noman, to the slouching Anakin, to even the ever proper Rafael, everyone in the room suddenly sat up straight as goosebumps covered their bodies. With wide eyes and chaotic minds, they looked at the man who was now sitting amongst them and tried to wrap their head around the news they had absorbed.

It was not just a matter of Lex actually being an Inn employee, which was mind blowing enough. No, instead the shock was because not only was he a worker of the Inn, he was the mysterious employee who had seemed to pop out of nowhere.

A single worker appearing or disappearing, amongst the numerous that worked in the various areas of the Inn, should not have been worthy of any interest. In fact, besides a few prominent workers, such as Z, who made regular appearances at the arena, most people did not know any of the workers.

So then why was the reaction to Leo so strong? And why was he described as mysterious?

It was because no one had heard of him, or the few that knew him had seen him so long ago they forgot he even existed. Yet, one day, he suddenly popped up out of thin air, and as a Foundation level expert, single handedly defeated over 300 Nascent realm cultivators!

This was not an insignificant accomplishment! In fact, Lex himself had no idea of the impact that single action had made. Earth alone was ruled by 5 Nascents for decades. The entire planet and all its countries and armies were vassals of those 5 people. Yet Lex fought off over 300 of them at the same time! HE DID THAT WHILE HE WAS IN THE FOUNDATION REALM!

Now, he sat amongst them, as a newly reached Golden Core level expert. Not a single one of them took Lex's strength lightly, from the extremely strong Larry to the system wielder Souta, to the much experienced Rafael.

There were simply no words to elaborate the insanity of the achievement properly. The fact that Larry fought Suzuki for days before being able to kill him spoke of the difficulty involved in a fight at a higher level. Yet Lex had taken a few hours, if at that.

"Access to news like that is just one of the perks that the Inn's employees get. You'll understand if I maintain my silence about some other details relating to the Inn. What's more important is that you understand that the information I got was directly from the Inn's sources. Some time ago, I had Marlo deliver the file to Fernanda. I had hoped that whoever was really behind all this would treat this matter seriously. After all, according to what I know, they were very particular about civilian casualties in cultivator matters. But either there is a holdup I'm not aware of, or they don't really care as much as I had expected for some reason, because no new action has been taken against the prisoners. At least as far as I know. This is not exactly an easy situation to investigate."

Lex looked at the bewildered Larry and then at Rafael. He gave the fellow a teasing wink, but said nothing else. He had said his part, and now it was the others turn to explain.

Rafael took in a deep breath as countless thoughts ran through his mind. This Lex... or Leo, whoever he was, could be phenomenal help to his own cause in the future.

A confident yet sly smile appeared on the man's face as he looked back at Lex.

"Well, your source is pretty good. I guess now it's time to tell you mine," he said, completely giving into Lex's incessant goading. He wanted to show off his own secrets as well. But regardless of how impressive his own secrets were, just by wanting to show off, a chink in his previously impenetrable armor appeared. He was finally playing according to Lex's tune instead of maintaining his composed state.

After all, the mere thought of wanting to show off would end up causing him to reveal a lot more than he might originally have planned to. The more he revealed, the more leverage Lex would gain.

"Actually, my source is fairly straightforward as well. My own memories are my source. You see, I am from the future, and I have already lived a very long time on Earth. It was only at the moment of my death that I was able to use a special treasure to travel back into my own body, so many years into the past."

The previously confident Lex was startled and nearly fell off his chair as he looked up at Rafael in shock. Then he turned to Noman, expecting him to whisper something. Yet when he didn't, he looked back at Rafael with eyes wide.

Rafael didn't show it, but internally he was greatly satisfied by Lex's reaction, and continued to elaborate.

"Actually, it's not so impressive. The future has already drastically changed for the entire earth just because of a few minor changes that happened. But some things... some things will not change no matter what happens on earth.

"I'm not sure if you're aware of this or not, but the solar system is in a region called the Dead zone. Dead zones are regions of space which suffer from a severe lack of spiritual energy. Yet in a few years, the deadzone in which the solar system exists will spontaneously undergo a change, bringing back spiritual

energy in a flood. While that seems like a good thing, there is a prisoner being held on Earth that is akin to a Goddess, known as Bastet."

Lex displayed an unusual expression at the mention of the name, but Rafael only assumed it was feedback at his news, further satisfying him secretly.

"With the return of spiritual energy, she will escape the prison. Such a thing is not really anyone's fault, but a few years later that will cause problems too. But, what's more relevant to your question of how I know the empire won't act against whoever rules on earth, comes next. With the return of spiritual energy, the earth entered what everyone assumed would be a prosperous era. But that couldn't be farther from the truth.

"While earthlings enjoyed the abundant spiritual energy, what no one knew was that there were a number of alien races that had been dormant for god only knows how long on numerous planets, moons and asteroids all across the dead zone."

Rafael paused, and his previous smug appearance disappeared, replaced by a somber one.

"The first race we came across was called the locusts - at least by the earthlings. It was not because they looked like insects, which they did. No, it was because they came like a calamity, blotting out the horizon with their vast numbers. Starved for hundreds of millennia probably, they ate anything and everything that contained spiritual energy, leaving nothing in their wake. And when I say everything, I mean EVERYTHING. One by one, they devoured the planets in the solar system, starting from the furthest out."

He paused again, lost in memory for a few moments.

"That was the first time I experienced hopelessness. They came from all directions, with the sun as their target. Any planet that stood in their way was nothing more than food. If they had come from a single direction, maybe we could have made a stand with the earth as a battlefield to block them. But no, from all directions, as well as up and below, they swarmed, blotting out the stars in the sky.

"Fortunately, no matter how powerful they were, they could not cross the distance between the planets and the sun in a short time. That gave us just enough time, not only to wallow in our impending doom,

but also to be saved. That was the first time I heard the name of the Jotun empire, when their fleets suddenly appeared one day surrounding the planet, getting ready to eliminate the invading enemies.

"That was also when I learned that... the earth, for thousands of years already, had been the private property of some noble family in the Jotun Empire."

Rafael looked back at the bewildered 'Leo' and took great pleasure in his surprised expression. How could he have known that while 'Leo' had said not a single word, he had put on that entire display of surprise to entice Rafael to say more. In truth, Lex had long gotten used to encountering world redefining things, so how could a little time travel take him by surprise?

He also discovered another way to take advantage of Noman's ability and presence.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 480: Uncertain future

After a few moments of acting taken aback, Lex had recomposed himself. After all, over acting was a thing, so he couldn't act like he was surprised by everything. Or at least he had to pretend like he was trying to regain composure.

A part of Rafael was disappointed to see him retreat behind his unreadable expression, but it was to be expected.

"I don't want to delve too deeply into the matter, but suffice to say, the empire played a big role in how events progressed in the future. The battle was not an easy or a simple one, despite the advanced technology of the empire, and lasted a few years. You may not be surprised to learn that many from earth were conscripted into that war - we had the most to lose, after all. I don't know if the empire couldn't send more forces our way, or just didn't think it was worth it. What I do know is that, after the war had been won, the empire left much in the same manner they arrived - silently and without warning. They did not reform the planet, despite its severe mismanagement, the way they had done in the Vegus system. I suspect that had a lot to do with the nobles who owned the planet.

"But though the war was over, and the majority of the locusts had been killed, many had still survived. It was those remaining few locusts that became the bane of earth's existence for the next few years, until, eventually, the next alien species that had been dormant finally revealed itself."

Rafael closed his eyes and took a deep breath in. So many things happened back then, and since he was involved in all of them, he never really had the time or energy to think too deeply about them. So many things didn't make sense, and hinted at the fact that there were secrets hidden behind them. But even if he had realized those things back then, he was just a soldier caught up in endless battles. How was he supposed to have discovered those secrets anyway?

He reopened his eyes and looked at Lex.

"So you see, the empire will not interfere because earth is already a part of the empire. Moreover, I don't know how much of a role the 'owners' of earth play in allowing the prisoners to wreak havoc, but I definitely know that at least for a time, earth will have to depend on them."

"So you want to just ignore whatever is happening on earth for the sake of the future?" Lex asked, his irritation evident in his voice. But he calmed down quickly without Rafael even having to give a response.

Some people may argue that Lex had weak morals, but that was far from the truth. He was just not an idealist, and he could see how antagonizing these people might be worse than just letting them be. After all, even if he became much stronger very quickly, it would not be to the level where he could protect the entire solar system depending only on himself, let alone the fact that Rafael said that there were other issues that earth faced.

"Alright, even if we avoid challenging them, for now, it does not solve Larry's problem. We can't just ignore the very real threat to his life."

"These are things I have no prior knowledge of from my last life. All I can say is, hope that whoever your target is, is not too important. Or at least he is someone whose death can be accepted."

"Let's hope," said Lex blandly. He had no intention of relying on his luck anymore, so that was a terrible idea, but he wasn't going to argue with Rafael needlessly over it.

"And then what about the various problems you saw in the future? I get not wanting to share that you know the future with anyone. After all, I can see how anyone you tell might want to target you because of it, and there's no guarantee that anyone would even help. But if you tell me what other problems you foresaw, we might be able to work out solutions to them."

Rafael shook his head, as if it was pointless.

"Too much of the future has changed, and too much is too sensitive to change. I can't be sure what problems might still happen, and I'm not sure what problems might change or become worse if I share information about them. I'm making preparations of my own, and keeping a close eye on all events. As soon as I can confirm the situation is heading down the path I recall, I can react, or share the information with you. But if I give you warnings, there's a very decent chance something you might do to prevent the situation makes it worse. On this, all any of you can do is trust me."

Lex remained silent, and looked the other people in the eye one by one. None of them seemed too surprised by what they heard. It seemed they had already had this conversation with Rafael before. Well, that, and for Noman it made sense since he had no affiliation to earth at all.

"That brings us back to Larry's issue. Ignoring everything else, we still don't know who the actual perpetrator is."

"If we can bring the prisoners to the Inn, we can easily discover the truth using Noman," said Anakin.

"Easier said than done. One of the reasons it's been so hard to check if there have been any changes with the prisoners is because they've stopped coming to the Inn. Their golden keys must have been withdrawn at some point."

"Alright, so we somehow deliver the keys to them, wait for them to escape from their prison to the Inn, and then use Anakin to discover who is the person targeting Larry. Once we know that, back on earth, we can take care of them. Or, if they're stupid enough, we challenge them on the murder grounds."

"To deliver the keys, we will need to know the location of the prisoners. I'm sure that's not so easy to discover," said Larry as he looked around the room. "Even if we discover the location, it is surely being guarded and it won't be so easy to overcome"

"Let's take things one step at a time," said Lex. "I'll try to see if I can learn where the prisoners are being held, and if it's possible to get a golden key to them. If I can't find a good solution, we can brainstorm a few other ideas. In the meantime, Rafael, why don't you go ask your dad to meet Fernanda and have an

upfront conversation? Having a direct source of what their stance is will be much better for us than guessing on our own. Who knows, maybe she'll even be open to some negotiations."

"You want my dad to... confront Fernanda? You know how that'll probably go, right?"

Lex just shrugged and said, "not really. I'm tempted to say that he'll just go and fight her, but Marlo is a King and an extremely successful businessman. If he didn't know how to maneuver difficult situations, he wouldn't have had much success in either field."

Rafael shook his head, but said nothing.

"Is there anything else?" Lex asked, taking off his glasses. It would be bad if Leo was seen exiting the chamber with everyone while Lex had been the one to enter with them.

"Say, hypothetically speaking, one wanted to become an employee of the Inn. How would one go about doing that?" Anakin asked in a seemingly very casual manner.

Lex smiled, but did not immediately reply. He looked at everyone sitting in the room in their eyes to try and gauge their interest. All of them seemed to be paying attention.

"You have to attract the Inn's attention, in the right way. If the Innkeeper sees potential in you, he might give you a platinum key which will allow you to take a test to see if you're worthy to work for the Inn. You can try giving the Mystery trial a go as well. Just to be clear, the trial won't get you hired, but there's a chance your performance might attract attention. I won't say anymore than that. Learning potentially sensitive information might not be the best thing for you."

No one asked any more questions about that, so it seemed like it was time for them to leave. Right before he got up, however, Lex looked at Rafael and said, "since you're adamant about keeping the future hidden, I won't try to persuade you otherwise. But you should know, Bastet has already been a guest at the Inn and, while I can't say for certain, I suspect she has already left the Earth."

Lex did not wait for Rafael to respond and just left. Rafael himself, though, was greatly startled, and even paled a bit.

If Bastet had already left... that would seriously affect his plans for the future. After all, in his previous life, the treasure he got to travel back in time was something he got with her help. In this life, however, he seemed to possess it already inside his body. What was going on?