

## **Innkeeper 491**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 491: Drifting

The cart that Lex bumped into immediately began swerving left and right. Since the race had just begun and all the carts were nearby, the swerving cart hit quite a few of them, immediately causing chaos.

Everyone, from the viewers to the drivers themselves, were taken aback by the tumultuous beginning as the races had more or less formed a pattern during the past two days. The first lap, while not free from competition, was usually peaceful as the drivers got used to the track and employed various tactics.

Due to how unpredictable the track itself could be, let alone how the various power ups the drivers received created unexpected variables, there was no real benefit in claiming first too early.

As such, most races started off peacefully and progressively became more and more destructive. Yet Lex had no intention of playing slowly, nor did he want to take his time getting used to the track.

For him, only two things were true. First was that he wanted to win, and he had enough confidence in his intuition, reflexes and abilities to get that win, even if he became a big target. Second, he was on vacation, so what was the point of doing things safely? Only an intense match would bring him maximum satisfaction, so he set himself apart from the get go.

Lex used his sharp instincts to maneuver carefully out of the initial confusion and suddenly gained a huge lead! Although there were still three or four cars in front of him, the road was open and free for him to do as he pleased!

Since everyone's golf cart was identical, they had the same acceleration, speed, breaks etc. so the greatest tool that Lex could reliably use was his driving ability. As a former resident of Manhattan, he did not have much need for a car so he didn't have a lot of driving experience, but he was learning now.

Taking advantage of his newly advanced capabilities of his mind, parts of Lex's focus were on observing and memorizing the minor details of how the cart responded to every move he made.

The first 100 meters of the track was straight before it carefully turned and expanded across a slope. He saw that one of the carts in front of him drifted into the curve while another was using the entire width of the track, going from one side to another, during the turn so that he wouldn't have to slow down at all. A third hit the brakes, to slow down enough to turn without going off the track.

Lex's first thought was that he would have to slow down as well, for he had too much forward momentum to turn quick enough, but another part of Lex which knew that even if the cart crashed at full speed, due to his resilience, he would not be harmed at all, wanted to copy the drift!

Lex had limited experience driving normally, let alone drifting. In fact, he had no knowledge of how to do it all!

A wide, wild grin painted Lex's face. With the cart speeding and the turn coming, he had no time to think so, instinctively, he entered the state of Flow! As if he was watching a film, his memory of everything the drifting golf cart did to drift played in his mind and, as if he were a machine, Lex copied all the actions exactly!

From the location where the cart entered the drift, its speed, how much it turned, everything was exactly identical. It was only after he exited the drift perfectly that he exited the flow state, and his emotions caught up to him.

The wind blowing in his hair, the sun shining down on him, the beautiful scenery of the Inn passing him by - he finally understood why Gerard liked this so much. Moreover, the drift was very clean and satisfying, but his heart was beating like crazy!

Although he knew he wouldn't get hurt, it was natural to get excited if you think you are going to crash. And it was only after he completed the drift that the feeling came to him because to drift, HE HAD TURNED THE WHEEL IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION OF THE ACTUAL TURN!

Despite himself, Lex couldn't help but laugh. He had no idea how that worked, but he was beginning to wonder why he had spent so many years without trying this ever?

But he had to turn his attention back to the race. It was far from over. Actually, it had just begun!

The first set of obstacles were coming his way. The track split into four, going over, around, through and under a set of very short hills. Moreover, parts of the track were covered in Delinquent Viper Vines. They wouldn't damage the cart, but if the cart came close enough, they would latch onto it, trapping the vehicle for a few seconds.

Lex observed the carts in front of him to see if they were doing anything else that was crazy that he could imitate, but they were splitting off. Lex decided to follow the one that was going over the hills. Whether that cart did anything or not, Lex suddenly had an inclination to overtake the cart by jumping over it using one of the slopes of the hills.

This time, Lex entered the Overdrive state and his spirit sense spread out in front of him, though currently its range was barely a few dozen feet. That didn't matter to Lex though. A part of his brain started doing careful calculations he would need to pull off such a maneuver. The conclusion he came to was that without a power up or boost of some kind, it would not be possible.

Lex was tempted to use an array, but that would go against the rules. A fire lit in his unresigned heart. What was the point of being a cultivator if he couldn't even surpass a fast and the family movie? There had to be a way.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 492: Mysterious and honorable Innkeeper

There was a void. Nothing existed for all of eternity, except for the color black, which was all encompassing. There was no sound, no temperature, no energy, nothing. But in that endless nothingness, a round, stone table appeared.

There was no light source, yet the table was perfectly visible and, in fact, forcibly attracted one's eyes in the vast nothingness. Since there was no light source, the table had no shadows either, which was very important. In this area that was devoid of everything, darkness was acceptable but shadows were not, for they would compromise the security of this place.

One moment the table existed alone, the next a group of nondescript figures appeared around it. Even if one tried, they would not be able to count the number of figures, for that information was just too elusive. It was for that reason that it seemed all but impossible to determine how large the group was, or how large the table was for that matter - after all, the only other thing with which to compare the existence of the table could not be properly observed at all.

Yet, when one of the figures began to speak, his appearance became clear, revealing a young, devilishly handsome man.

"The phenomenon has ended, but the Origin realm did not elevate, which means a Daolord was not born. I strongly suspect that someone was manufacturing a Dao treasure, and I have a suspicion of who it might be."

"Why should that matter to me, Ballom?" asked another figure, revealing his appearance as that of a Celestial. "Or to any of us? We are all here, in this fledgling realm, to observe the formation of laws to expand our own understanding of laws. Whoever is interfering is speeding up the process, which is taking away precious time from us to observe. I say, let the Henali evict whoever it is so that they stop causing us problems."

"No, forget him. Do elaborate. A Dao treasure you say? Tell me more" The third figure that spoke revealed itself to be a dragon, and a massive one at that.

"Do you think I invited you all here because I wanted you to do something?" Ballom asked, scoffing. "What? Did you think I wanted to steal the treasure? Do you think what happened to Ra wasn't enough warning?"

"Wait, you think the Innkeeper is responsible for the phenomenon?" asked another figure yet again, this time in the appearance of an angel. She had four, beautiful white wings and a halo of pure light above her head, which, accompanied by her own reprehensible beauty, made her a figure which haunted everyone's damn nightmares.

Ballom, as well as every other figure, resisted the urge to grimace at hearing her voice. That stupid angel was too freaking powerful, and never restrained herself. All of them quickly scrubbed the memory of her voice from their brains, lest she start appearing in their dreams - again.

"The aura of the phenomenon was unique, I would have recognized it if I had ever felt it before. But my instinct tells me that the aura is at least related to the Innkeeper."

"It's not your instincts, just your wishful thinking," said another figure, revealing a spirit. "You humanoids all favor one another."

"Being humanoid has nothing to do with it," said Ballom, his voice turning ever deeper as he changed from his human appearance to his true one. "I have met him so I know. He is a mysterious man the depth of whom even I was not able to gauge, though I didn't really try to avoid being rude. His means elude me, and his purpose is unknown. I brought you all here not to conspire against him, but as a professional courtesy. If the Innkeeper really is the one who caused the phenomenon, then other than being powerful enough to oneshot Ra, an original Deity of this realm, he is a deeply knowledgeable person from whom we can learn much."

The other Daolords listened, but did not reveal their true thoughts about what the Devil said. Honor? Respect? Devils cared for none of that, only profit. They knew he had some hidden purpose, they just didn't know what.

The meeting continued on past that topic, and many secret deals were struck. No one found it ironic that a meeting held by a devil had more participants than the one held by the Henali themselves. After all, the Henali were the owners and enforcers of this realm. Why would they do shady business in front of them?

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The mysterious, profound and honorable Innkeeper, as many Daolords knew of him as, was grinning ear to ear as his cart was pushed to the finish line by all the carts behind him. In his search to find loopholes in his own event, Lex discovered one that would make the game kind of boring, but then at the same time, the thought of irritating and frustrating so many drivers excited Lex's inner child. Most of all, it wasn't like he was cheating or anything, so no one could blame him.

Since the only way in which he could use his ability was defensively, his plan required him to become the car in the lead. Once there, he turned around and used Talk to the Hand. The invisible shield it created now was much larger than before, and though the technique had not been able to bring out his full might as a Golden Core cultivator, it was strong enough to withstand anything his fellow contestants threw at him.

So, now in the lead, and with his invisible shield deployed behind him, Lex let go of the accelerator, and awaited the rest of the carts. Not realizing an invisible shield stood in their path they would crash into it full force, pushing Lex forward each time.

To be honest, Lex originally didn't plan on being so mean to them. But when he became the target of every other racer for not only being a crowd favorite, but a nuisance on the track, Lex felt it was okay if he let loose a little.

Truth be told, this was very different from how Lex normally behaved. But he was feeling good today, so it was fine to act a little childish.

Like that, in complete disbelief of the entire crowd, all the participants, as well as the race commentator himself, Lex won the race and became a nominee for the Grand Prix.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 493: Finally meeting the emperor

After winning his race, Lex's emotions finally calmed down a bit. He spent some more time as Leo, going around the Inn and interacting with various guests. The Gamer's Den had various sites now that he visited, all of which were thoroughly packed.

That was because other than the weekly events that would be updated every so often, many smaller events were concurrently happening everywhere. In the Gamer's Den there was a tournament for a very popular game called 'Cooking Simulator: Gourmet Oreos' (CS: GO). Compared to something like racing, this was a very niche tournament. Still, the crowds it drew were very big.

Considering that he himself, with the identity of the owner of Gamer's Den, had done very little to actually run it, he felt like he should give Z a raise or something. In fact, the moment he thought about the idea, he implemented it.

His employees' salaries were never counted as a part of his total MP, for he always estimated how much he would need to pay them monthly, and then directly pay the system for 6 months in advance. That way, in case he ever became tight on funds, like when he spent it all on the hearth, he wouldn't have to worry about paying his workers, of which there were many.

Once he was done with the rounds, however, he teleported back to his apartment and began meditating. Lex was not one to put off things he needed to do, at least on purpose, so it was time to meet the emperor.

The meeting did not incite any nervousness in him, though admittedly he was curious about why the emperor wanted to meet with him. He asked Velma if she was able to discover anything about his purpose, but she was not able to provide him with much.

What she did mention, however, was that from the moment he had appeared, the entire gossip trends in the Inn changed. Apparently, he was a man of significant influence, even among other species, though actual information about him was scarce everywhere. Instead, there was a lot of information available about his four advisors, who followed him everywhere.

Apparently, 3 of them were the founders of the 3 strongest noble families in the empire, right under the royal family, namely the Butt family, the Togoldor family, and the Knight family. The Butt family acted as the financial advisors to the royal family, the Togoldor family as military advisors and the Knight family handled the secret intelligence for the royal family.

The fourth advisor was more secretive and relatively unknown, but it was said that he was the emperor's right-hand man, and most trusted subordinate. There was one story about him that was very famous, though when Lex read about it, it seemed more gossip than anything realistic.

It was said that when the emperor was young and weak, he was once targeted by a succubus - a devil of extreme capabilities. While everyone else succumbed to the succubus' charm, the fourth advisor remained completely unaffected and, in fact, made the succubus fall in love with him, and act as a double agent on their behalf.

Lex nearly gagged when he read that. It was a typical story spread by men with over inflated egos, trying to market their 'prowess' as exceptional. He would be genuinely disappointed if this story was actually being spread by the man himself, but Lex highly doubted it. He was familiar enough with celebrity culture to know how wild stories can be created and spread without any actual proof.

If only Lex had heard how the same was being done with the Innkeeper, but the ones gossiping were Dao lords and deities.

Once Lex had adjusted his state of mind, and he was ready to hold the meeting, he teleported to his office, and instructed Luthor to personally go and escort the emperor and his group over.

A fleet of especially luxurious golf carts which Xeon had especially designed for the Inn could be seen driving over to the Midnight Manor, attracting a lot of attention. The emperor had already been informed by a hologram message that the Innkeeper had returned, and was sending someone over to have him picked up.

Emperor Jotun had met with many important beings in many prestigious places. He had been escorted in spaceship, advanced vehicles, on the backs of eminent mounts and in carriages pulled by dangerous creatures, yet he had to admit, this was the first time he would be brought to a meeting in a golf cart.

But while the emperor was admiring the golf carts, his four advisors had their eyes trained on Luthor. In the past few days they had realized that many of the workers at the Inn, despite being human, had a bloodline that they had never even heard of before! While that in itself wasn't rare, when considering the ridiculous might their bloodlines delivered, it should have been impossible for them to not know of it!

After all, they lived at the center of the human civilization in their realm. How could they not know of such a broken bloodline? They were even tempted to bring all their sons and daughters to the Inn and immediately have them begin courting their workers.

But fortunately for their sanity, all of them seemed to have the same bloodline. As unusual as even that fact was, they could accept that there was one bloodline that had eluded them, regardless of how amazing it was. Yet now, Luthor displayed an aura of a different bloodline. They could not directly deduce what the bloodline did, regardless of how powerful they were, and even the Regalia Bloom they were only able to draw some deductions based on old videos of the workers using them in fights. But now that Luthor was displaying an aura of a different bloodline, their minds began working in overdrive. His cultivation was practically nonexistent, yet if he was the Innkeeper's assistant, his bloodline must be exceptional as well. Never, in recent memory, had their emotions been toyed with as much as it had been these last few days.

The emperor instead only nodded to Luthor and got in the cart. He did not take offense to such a display, for he knew different cultures and beings followed different customs. He was, however, thoroughly amused. As for Luthor's bloodline? Jotun had created his own bloodline for his descendants, and he was perfectly confident in its abilities. He did not need to envy others.

Actually, all four of his advisors had also created their own bloodlines as well. But while the same experience brought indifference to Jotun, to his advisors, it brought a reverence for anyone who had the power to create such formidable bloodlines.

The various random thoughts, however, ended when he entered the Innkeepers office building. The reception hall radiated an aura that intimidated even him, though he could tell that he was not the target of the aura. It simply existed and, moreover, it suppressed everyone equally.

He, as an emperor and a person with immense cultivation, found it just as hard to take a single step as his four followers.

The emperor had no intentions of being haughty to begin with, but this display immediately reminded him that the person he was about to meet had garnered the attention of the Henali. An entity of such caliber... was definitely above him.

But while it was difficult, none of them were people who would shy away from difficulty. They walked through the entire hall from start to finish without letting their struggles become apparent. An outside observer would only see them walking normally, if a bit slowly, across the hall.

Before the meeting had even begun, Lex had used the innate feature of the Innkeepers office building to establish himself in the emperor's mind, so that, in the unlikely scenario, he did lose control of his spirit sense, no one would question him.

This was not something Lex consciously planned, but something he had just become adept at doing. Otherwise, whenever someone wanted to meet with him, Lex would usually teleport over himself. Not this time.

Having established a psychological advantage, Lex welcomed the emperor and his four followers into his office, and immediately almost lost his composure.

It was not the emperor who drew his attention, nor was it his three named advisors. Instead, it was the fourth and more mysterious advisor whose existence startled Lex.

He looked like a young man in his early 20s, with fair skin and dark hair. He wore very little expression on his face, but his brown, deep-set eyes and sharp jaw worked well with his seemingly impassive face to give him a mature yet handsome look.

Though since when did Lex care about someone else's look? No, what grasped Lex's attention was... the fact that the man looked completely identical to himself. It was like he was looking at a twin. Then, Lex checked the mans' status.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 494: Sephore

Five men had entered the Innkeeper's office, but while Lex's gaze swept past all of them, it paused nearly imperceptibly on the last person Lex saw. But the brief pause was not a reflection of how shocked Lex was, but rather a result of Lex's advancing cultivation and the absolute control his Host Attire afforded him.

The man was the spitting image of Lex, to the point where they even had the same height and physique. After the initial surprise wore off, Lex came up with a few explanations. After all, the universe was so wide and the human population was so vast. It shouldn't be impossible that two unrelated people happened to look identical.

As if having already accepted his explanation, Lex scanned him as if his information would somehow shed light on the matter. But instead it only added to the confusion of the situation.

Name: William Sephore

Age: 467,223

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???(Too high for host to see)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 2

Condition: There is an incredibly strong restriction on his body, suppressing a disease. The Inn is currently incapable of treating the guest.

Remarks: Great, now there's two of them!

William was a common name. Just because it was his last name didn't mean others couldn't have it. In fact, Will Bentham, one of his old guests, was actually named William. The same name did not mean they were related. But the situation was just too coincidental. Too many coincidences made Lex uncomfortable, and reminded of his fight with the murderer back in the Crystal realm. He had been incredibly wary of luck since then.

Whatever the truth was, Lex would definitely investigate now that his attention had been brought to it. There was no reason to lose composure over it. It would have been so convenient if his intuition gave him some information, but it only provided him with one clear piece of data: the group opposite to him were too strong for his intuition to play any role whatsoever.

All of that had happened in less than the blink of an eye, and none of the others in the room seemed to have picked up on it. But the reason it was nearly an imperceptible pause, instead of directly an imperceptible one, was because William himself had detected it. Moreover, the subtle change in the expression within his eyes let Lex know that the man had noticed.

But Lex was not put off balance by the fact that his lapse had been detected. There were too many ways to deal with the situation, and as the Innkeeper, he held all the cards. In fact, he could completely pretend like he wanted his gaze to be detected by William to begin with.

"Welcome, my guests," the Innkeeper turned his attention back to Jotun, as he decided to scan all three. "My apologies for making you wait so long to meet."

While he was speaking, Lex already scanned the remaining four.

First, of course, he scanned the famous emperor.

Name: Jotun Marcus Sephore

Age: 467,227

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???(Too high for host to see)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: He is formidable - perfect to be hired as a bodyguard.

Then came the advisor standing closest to him.

Name: Nisar Sephore Butt

Age: 467,218

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???(Too high for host to see)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: He looks like a tax evader, but the Inn does not charge GST!

Then the remaining two.

Name: Batu Sephore Togoldor

Age: 467,215

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???(Too high for host to see)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: He looks like he makes his bed every morning to boost productivity through the day. It can only be speculated about the last time he actually used the bed for anything other than making it.

Name: Henry Sephore Knight

Age: 467,210

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???(Too high for host to see)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: He carries the scent of murder. A definite potential client for the Murder Grounds!

"It's no trouble at all," said the emperor, Jotun, with a chuckle as he approached the Innkeeper. "After all, I know how hectic managing things can be. Every day, over 30,000 planets in my empire face an armageddon level event. Just making sure my subjects don't all accidentally die over every small apocalypse that comes their way takes up so much time. I can't even imagine the workload you must have."

Jotun's tone was extremely relaxed and casual, and he did not appear at all as if he was an emperor. His carefree attitude and easygoing behavior gave Lex a positive impression of the man.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jotun, and these are my little brothers, William, Nisar, Batu and Henry."

"It's a pleasure, Jotun. Please, guests, have a seat. I hope you have found the Inn suitable for your stay these past few days. It is unfortunate that you did not arrive a few days earlier, or you could have taken advantage of the situation like everyone else."

"Haha not all Innkeeper, a few days here or there won't make a difference to us. Besides, if I began cultivating now, it would be years before I become free again. But I have already sent one of your golden keys towards my wife, and am anxiously awaiting her arrival. It's been over a decade since I saw her last. My heart can endure another millenia to cultivate, but not yet another moment to hold her!"

Jotun winked at the Innkeeper as he burst into a fit of excited laughter. Even though Lex always made sure to maintain a light smile when he was acting as the Innkeeper, feeling Jotun's genuine happiness, he could not help but smile a little wider.

His gaze turned to Jotun's 'brother'. He had no idea the advisors were actually from his family, as nowhere on the Henali portal was that mentioned. But then again, it made sense for people of such importance to keep their secrets close.

As his younger brothers, as Lex had confirmed by checking their ages, they were completely immune to Jotun's behavior and maintained their polite expressions.

The Innkeeper

## Chapter 495: Family

"I trust that you gentlemen also enjoyed your stay. Did you find any of the ongoing festivities to your liking?"

Before they could answer, Lex turned towards William and said, "Mr. William, we have a lot of devils amongst our guests and a few of them are definitely succubus' so I have no doubt you at least had fun."

Despite trying to keep their polite expressions, the unexpected comment caused all the brothers, save William himself, to erupt uproariously into laughter! The one known as Batu, the founder of the Togoldor family, actually fell from his chair and started rolling over.

William himself slightly blushed and pretended to cough to clear his throat while he subtly kicked Batu off to the side.

"Innkeeper, I assure you, while I might have had a few... unexpected girlfriends in my youth, any rumors you might have heard are greatly exaggerated."

"A few... a few... 'unexpected' he says," Henry said while wheezing with laughter, only to also receive a kick from William. Lex noticed that, although Williams' kicks were not hard, whoever received them became completely incapacitated from it.

Lex only gave a half smirk, as if he understood what William was implying. In truth, he had no intention of embarrassing the man, but passing such a comment would automatically explain why he, as the Innkeeper, might have given William more attention than his brothers, thus once again lowering his guard.

"Such is the nature of youth," the 24 year old shamelessly said to the man older than 400,000 years.

"Oh man, I completely forgot about that," said Jotun, effortlessly dodging one of Williams' kicks. "Innkeeper you have truly brought up some fond memories."

"People love to gossip with some of the Inn's workers, and I occasionally end up hearing a few things. Of course, gossip is just gossip. No one takes it too seriously."

"Oh you should..." began Nisar, but William directly kicked him in the face to shut him up.

"It is not even gossip, but a rather unfortunate fairy tale one of my brothers spread when I was young, and it has followed me since. I suspect from time to time someone revives the rumors, but I've yet to find proof."

"If you of all people cannot find proof, brother, then it surely doesn't exist," said Jotun, keeping a suspiciously straight face while effortlessly dodging all attacks.

The meeting Lex was supposed to have with the emperor had turned strangely comical, and not at all what Lex had been originally expecting, but that could work in his favor. The longer they conversed about unimportant topics, the more time Lex would have to dig up details about William. If they got directly to the heart of the matter, it would seem improper if Lex diverted the flow of conversation towards anything else.

"At the Inn we have a Guild room where you can leave tasks for those qualified to fulfill. Perhaps you could hire a detective," said Lex, in an attempt to keep the conversation flowing.

"It's not a matter a detective can resolve, Innkeeper," Jotun explained, as he wiped a single tear from his eye. "There are few, human or otherwise, who can compete with good old William. If there was a clue to detect, a mystery to unravel, a lead to follow, anything at all really, he would have already picked up on it. Since he hasn't, then that means there's nothing."

"Or the perpetrator knows exactly how to avoid my detection," William said blandly, looking directly at Jotun. It need not be explained who he suspected as the culprit.

"Innkeeper, I saw you have a news agency where you sell sensitive information," said Henry, the founder of the Knight family, who was head of the royal family's intelligence department.

"Perhaps you can have them look into the matter. It would not do if one of the pillars of our empire was maligned like this so publicly."

He spoke with a straight face and genuine concern, but Lex suspected he was still teasing William.

"I will have them look into the matter, though the Midnight News is run by one of my workers. I don't know if she will be able to investigate such a matter, she is still young."

Lex paused for a moment before he continued.

"All my workers here at the Inn are very young, and have just begun to spread their wings. I treat them like family, but I am busy so often that I worry their familiar bonds will grow weak. It is good to see that you brothers have maintained such a strong bond, even after so much time."

Lex's statement was, of course, a probing one. Although he had his suspicions, it wasn't like he could ask them personal questions directly. Besides, of them all, William was the only one who supposedly hadn't sired a prominent family. Lex was probably just a victim of over imagination. There was no way he was related to this man who looked completely identical to him and had Lex's last name as his first name.

"Family... family is complicated, for everyone," said Nisar with a sigh, his previous jovial mood dissipating. "Though as brothers we've remained close, Jotun is the only one of us who really even meets his descendants anymore - and even that is often because of work. And poor William, his family is too embarrassed to meet him even if he were willing."

"Oh? Do you mind me asking why?" asked Lex, making sure to display only the appropriate amount of curiosity.

"I don't blame them, but... they're just too unlucky. Not a single one of them has ever been able to fully unlock the bloodline William passed onto them, causing them to develop very poorly. It's so much so that they don't even dare publicize that they are related to one of the emperors 'advisors'."

So that means William does have a family... though they are apparently weak. And what does it even mean that they couldn't unlock the bloodline he passed to them? Since they were all brothers, shouldn't they all pass the same bloodline down to their descendants?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 496: Anger

Lex tried to recall what he knew about bloodlines. Once, as Leo, he has asked John about the topic of bloodlines, and he had seen some random bits of information while casually browsing the portal.

Bloodlines in Beasts was an entirely different topic, for the Beasts' entire cultivation was based on their bloodline limits. But for other species, such as humans, it was not the same. The basic gist of it was that it was something that gave whoever had the bloodline access to special powers or abilities.

But the source of that power was a mystery to Lex, as well as how their limitations were defined, because the Inn workers truly had some broken bloodlines.

Lex's memory had improved considerably, so after a moment of deliberation, he recalled that one of the ways that John had described the creation of bloodlines, especially in humans, was through cultivation. As a cultivator reaches higher levels, they naturally unlock certain abilities or affinities that are a result of the unique combination of their natural affinities and their cultivation technique, any natural treasures they might have absorbed, or the various inheritances they received.

For example, it was highly likely that if nothing untoward had happened to his cultivation technique, Lex would have given birth to a bloodline that would increase defensive capabilities, or something along those lines. Maybe the Lucky Sutra would give birth to a bloodline that affected luck.

Having recalled that, another question came to Lex's mind, though he wouldn't be able to ask such a thing. Although all five brothers had gone on to create families with their own surnames, each of them had the Sephore surname. Lex found it hard to believe that all 5 brothers were able to become so formidable if whatever family they originally belonged to was not powerful to begin with, so shouldn't they already have had bloodlines? Moreover, he'd never heard this Sephore name before.

Lex audibly sighed as the Innkeeper and said, "Although we can provide our families with many tools, ultimately they have to walk their own paths."

Lex took a moment to gather his thoughts. Even if it was just in his own mind, he had to voice his suspicion. He suspected that... William might be one of his ancestors. As improbable and impossible as it may seem, it was still a lot more believable than the man just happened to look completely identical to Lex out of sheer coincidence.

But it seemed like... William himself was very distant from his family, and wasn't very close to them. If he wanted to investigate this matter, he would have to start from a different angle - most likely his own parents back on earth.

Seriously, if this was the secret his family was keeping, Lex would be immensely pissed and slightly confused. Even if he could let go of everything else, Lex could not forget the fact that he had a brain tumor for God only knew how long! How many months had Lex spent in depression, unaware that his mood was being affected by the growth in his brain? How much anxiety had he gone through to grow the Inn to the level where he had enough MP to upgrade his cultivation finally to the level where it could remove his tumor?

Flashbacks of the immense struggle and fear he faced when he faced zombies for the first time filled his mind. As little as it phased him now, he had gone from being a regular joe on earth to literally fighting for his life against literal demons, just for his chance to remove his tumor.

A tinge of anger flashed through his heart as he imagined his parents giving him some kind of stupid spiel about how facing his own challenges allowed him to grow and mature. It was true, after putting his life on the line time and time again, his brain tumor literally making him do one stupid thing after another, he had become much more resilient. But since he had to go through so much growth without them, he saw no reason why they should be a part of his journey moving forward either.

But the flash of anger was just that: a flash. Lex quickly calmed himself down and reminded himself that everything going through his head was just his imagination at the moment. Until he confronted them, and found out the truth of the matter, he should not jump to conclusions.

With his mind made up, he would not have to drag his conversation with the emperor out any longer. Although, admittedly, he was curious about the emperor's family history. There wasn't even some purpose behind it - he just found it interesting. How had these 5 brothers managed to come so far and achieve so much?

"Even I had to walk my own path without my family's aid," the Innkeeper said with a hint of melancholy in his voice.

The brother's expression subtly changed upon hearing that. So far, the conversation had been light and casual. Even when talking about their families, they did not treat it too seriously. But for the Innkeeper, someone at the peak of this realm, to mention anything about his past was a matter they absolutely could not treat it lightly.

While for the other brothers this was a potential opportunity to learn some secrets about reaching higher realms, for Jotun it was a different matter entirely. He had been briefed before being sent to the Inn. Although it was not his main objective, he had been tasked with learning as much as possible about the Innkeeper, for the Henali had revealed exactly what they knew about him: absolutely nothing!

"Was there a reason your family did not aid you?" Knight asked, trying his level best to hide the hesitation in his voice.

"Maybe. Since they never told me, I never asked. And since they decided not to be a part of my journey from the beginning, I don't see a reason for them to be a part of my journey now."

The brothers felt goosebumps all over their bodies as their imagination went wild!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 497: Misunderstandings

Jotun's four younger brothers all suddenly thought of their own families. They could not be blamed, for after being alive for so long, their perception of family and family values was bound to be different from normal people. Yet they could not help but take the Innkeepers words as a warning.

Even by their own standards, they had distanced themselves too much from their families, and for tens of thousands of years began treating them more as employees who worked for them rather than family. Perhaps it was time to reassess their relationship a bit. That did not mean they would begin coddling their families, but that at least they should not be so distant.

To some extent, it was true that their lack of oversight had become a huge problem. If not, then how could Noman have been hunted down by outsiders on his family's own planet with none the wiser?

How could Lex know that a random statement he said while feeling momentarily overwhelmed with emotion would reveal gross levels of corruption within the empire, and have far reaching consequences?

But that was only a minor misunderstanding. The reason Lex had even thought to voice one of his thoughts was because he was confident in his own image, and knew that instead of finding loopholes in

his statements, people would instead find ways to explain and make sense of them. After all, that was the logical thing to do when listening to someone who knew more and had greater experience than you.

What he absolutely could not have expected was the misunderstanding he would cause with Jotun. The Henali knew nothing about the Innkeeper, not even his true race, or, as unbelievable as it may seem, when he entered the Origin realm.

Though he employed humans most often, no one believed for even a moment that he himself was a human, though it was clear he was humanoid. But now, Jotun learned something very important. The Innkeeper had some kind of backing as well, and instead of something relatively loose like an organization or his race, it was his family. What was more important was that, while he talked about being distanced from his family, the use of present tense indicated that the family, whoever or wherever they might be, still existed.

Jotun did not think that him being sent here by the Henali should be a secret, in which case everything the Innkeeper said should have had deeper meaning. Anything that the Innkeeper revealed was meant to be communicated upwards to them, and so this was the Innkeeper revealing something about his background. After all, a family that could give birth to a Dao lord... was far more powerful than an organization that did the same.

Lex noticed the changes in his audience's expression, but he could only imagine what was going through their minds.

"It has been a while since I had a chat like this with one of my guests," said the Innkeeper. "It is quite refreshing. But I cannot let pleasant conversation keep me from addressing your real concerns. Gentlemen, how can I help you?"

Jotun's pleasant expression dissolved and a somber look replaced it.

"I do not really require anything, Innkeeper, but I have been tasked by the Henali to come here. There were... a few matters they were unable to converse with you over during the Henali assembly, and so they sent me."

Lex did not change his expression, but he became a lot more serious instantly, and all thoughts of his family had been thrown out. The Henali assembly was the start of a lot of problems for him, so he did

not take it lightly. Moreover, he did expect that his sudden disappearance might cause certain problems for him down the line. Now it was time to see exactly how much trouble he was in.

Lex did not say anything and simply continued to look at Jotun, so the emperor kept on speaking.

"The Henali have decided to overlook the matter of you unleashing your powers on the Origin realm, given that Ra attacked you first, but have requested that you refrain from using such abilities again. As you know, instability by energy bursts during the maturing period of a realm can cause it to completely destabilize."

Lex did not speak, or nod even. He actually didn't know that, or anything of such matters, so it was best not to say anything at all.

"There are, however, a couple of matters that the Henali wished to address, both being equally serious. The first is that they have no record of you paying the toll to enter the Origin realm. This is a serious matter that cannot be overlooked, since all Dao lords who have entered the realm have paid the toll. There can be no preferential treatment on this."

The emperor paused in case the Innkeeper wished to speak, or clarify on the matter, but seeing that the Innkeeper did not speak, he continued.

"The second matter is also very serious. According to the laws set by the Henali, all nonnative entities that enter the Origin realm have to contribute in the fight against the Fuegan. This is also a matter on which there can be no preferential treatment. While you yourself would not be expected to make a move, considering the limitations of controlling your strength, the Inn must participate.

"All matters other than these two are negotiable, and can be discussed at the convenience of both parties. But these two matters... they absolutely have to be complied with."

A million different thoughts ran through Lex's mind as he tried to analyze the repercussions of what this meant, and his possible future actions. The one thing that was clear, though, was that Lex could not afford to offend the Henali, but at the same time, he could not appear to be weak.

For once, Lex did not suppress his natural reaction, as the authenticity of it would benefit him as he had already decided his stance on the matter.

A sigh escaped the Innkeeper's lips as he shook his head gently, as if he had encountered a minor inconvenience.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 498: Marketing

"Is that all you've been asked to do? Deliver this message?" Lex asked, his voice as calm and unperturbed as ever. It seemed like this was a minor matter to him, and one which he did not pay too much attention to.

Jotun shook his head and said, "I was also tasked with assessing the degree of aid the Midnight Inn could provide in military efforts against the Fuegan."

"Oh? And what is your assessment?" Lex asked with genuine curiosity.

"Excellent potential for aid, but at the moment, it is only potential. All the Inn members I've come across are quite weak, and won't have a sufficient impact on the war efforts. But within 50,000 years I believe it will have a strong presence."

Lex chuckled and said, "The Midnight Inn is in the hospitality sector, not military. My workers are trained to serve food, not fight in wars. I just want to run a simple Inn, I wonder why people keep interfering in that."

Jotun tensed up, though he did nothing else. If the Innkeeper became discontent, there would be nothing he could do to fight back, but nothing of the sort happened.

"To be perfectly honest, I have not paid much attention to things besides my Inn. But if my actions have caused an oversight, I don't mind remedying the situation. Since you have stated yourself that the Inn's military power is not enough to contribute, but the Henali require a contribution nonetheless, why don't we instead focus on how the Inn can contribute?"

"No doubt, you've already realized the massive benefits the Inn provides, even if with nothing else, with the ability to teleport here from any location. Moreover, the Inn also has a connection to the Henali portal.

"The way I see it, this is the perfect place to host a logistics and command center for a campaign against the Fuegan. As a part of my contribution, I can even give a considerable discount on hosting the command center at the Inn. What do you think?"

The brothers had imagined many ways that this meeting could go but... they did not anticipate that it would turn into a marketing pitch for the Inn. To be fair, the idea was excellent. Even if nothing else, just using the Inn and the Guild room as a transport hub would save an immense amount of wealth and time, completely revolutionizing the war industry. But at the same time, it would involve trusting the Innkeeper and the Inn with direct control and influence over their assets and personnel. It was an extremely risky move.

"I will pass on your suggestion," said Jotun, not making any decision himself. To be honest, he was extremely loyal to the Henali, for they had played a great role in his growth, but he was not blindly loyal. The way he saw it, if the Henali could be bothered to do any of this themselves, no extra effort would be required on anyone else's part. Since they didn't care enough to do anything personally, then he saw no reason why he should care too much about their campaigns, either. He had his own agendas to focus on, after all.

"I hope you're not in a rush to leave too quickly if your business is concluded," said Lex, noticing the brothers visibly relaxing with how the conversation turned out. "There are more festivities coming up that you can enjoy. Even if you're not interested in that, there is a matter I will take the liberty to say on behalf of one of my guests. I believe Ragnar Asulf is a general in one of your armies. I will not intrude on the privacy of one of my guests, even if he is your subordinate, but I believe you and he, all, will benefit greatly from having a... discreet meeting within the Inn."

The Innkeeper's statement both confused and alarmed the group. They were confused because, while they knew of Ragnar, he should not have faced any situation prominent enough to attract their attention personally. The fact that the Innkeeper thought that it was otherwise meant that there was a very serious flaw in the flow of information within their network.

This was a critical flaw that could threaten the very foundation of their empire. After all, controlling various galaxies was most definitely not easy, and there were more than just a few factions that created problems for them. Still, with the help of the Henali, they had always been able to keep everything

under control. But at the end of the day, the Henali would only help them, not rule the empire for them. If there was a flaw, it needed to be addressed immediately.

The confusion was because they wondered why the Innkeeper would point this out to them. Though they had exchanged some banter, and the meeting had gone relatively well, they could still not be considered on friendly terms. The only logical conclusion they came to was that.. the Innkeeper had a good relationship with Ragnar.

They were not far from the truth. No matter what his motives had been, Lex did not forget the help Ragnar extended when he needed the Entis Core. Moreover, the general still had a room rented at the Inn, where he kept some items hidden in case of his untimely demise. He had laid out instructions of who were to take the items were that to happen.

The mere fact that he had done such a thing meant that he was expecting some kind of trouble. And then there was the matter of the 1 trillion MP task. Everything pointed towards the man being in some kind of trouble.

Even though he had not asked for it, Lex did not mind lending a hand to help him out, especially if it was as simple as speaking a few words. Perhaps it had been the same with the general and the Entis Core.

"As it so happens, I might become his in-law soon," said Jotun with a smile, "so I was planning on meeting him, anyway. And fret not, Innkeeper, there is no way I'm leaving the Inn before I get to reunite with my wife."

Jotun was winking again, and his brothers were trying hard not to facepalm.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 499: Figure

Once the meeting had subsided and the brothers all returned to the Midnight Manor, they ordered some food and all retired to the same room. The rooms in the Manor were not as big as some of the others due to the fact that they were some of the earliest designed rooms, but the five of them were able to fit in comfortably, especially considering that they were all just sitting around.

It seemed that the brothers were sitting and eating in silence, but that was only because their true conversation was taking place via spirit sense.

"What do you think, William?" asked Jotun, his voice lacking all the joviality it contained during the meeting.

"It is difficult to guess the intention of the Innkeeper, yet at the same time, the Innkeeper could not have made the truth more obvious."

A flashback of everything that happened appeared in everyone's mind, played scene by scene. The barely perceptible additional pause the Innkeeper took when looking at William was magnified immensely in the flashback, making it obvious to the group what had happened.

"From the first moment we entered, he already began giving us information through subtle hints. By looking at me longer than the rest, he singled me out, but then proceeded to not give me any extra attention. Instead, he initiated the conversation normally. But think, what was the first thing he began talking about?"

The flashback continued and just after Jotun introduced the group, the first thing the Innkeeper brought up was the star rank raising event a few days ago.

"That is the second hint. We can extrapolate what it means individually of the whole meeting, but I think all the pieces join together to form a puzzle, and no single thing is more important than any other. So now we have 2 hints.

"Next, after our idiot brother was done being thirsty for his wife, he put a front of asking how we liked our stay, but before we could answer, diverted the topic to me and my... history with the devil. So now, he has focused on me twice, as well as brought up the devils. The third hint.

"Then, in a roundabout way, the topic goes to youth, the fourth hint. Finally, after that, it goes to the topic of family, the fifth hint. After that we find out that the Innkeeper has left his family behind because they never aided him when he was young, but now that he's strong, they're probably coming back and trying to get on his good side."

William took in a big breath, as he silently analyzed all the information.

"In all of this, from me, to the star event, to the succubus, to youth and family, there is only one thing the Innkeeper is trying to tell us. He's telling us his background. And what do all of these things have in common? Devils.

"The Innkeeper is trying to tell us that... he is a Devil, who has left the Devils behind. Now, they're doing everything in their power to get him back."

"It makes sense! Devils only care about profits, and the Innkeeper even turned him contributing to the war efforts into a marketing pitch for his Inn," said Batu.

"Don't forget who benefited most from the star rank event? The Devils," said Nisar.

"There's a rumor that last year, the Inn had an event specifically targeting the Devils," said Henry.

Since the brothers had already made a deduction, they continuously found more and more evidence to support it. So the question now was, should they report their speculation, or keep it to themselves?

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Lex spent a few good hours sitting in his office after the meeting concluded. He ran through everything that had happened in his mind again and again. It did not help that there were so many things to attract his attention.

There was the matter of William looking like his twin. There was the matter of the Henali asking for some kind of toll. There was the matter of a potential war campaign being run from within the Inn in the future.

It was a good thing that Lex had learnt to keep his emotions calm, or else he might have been overwhelmed. But though he was not overwhelmed, he did not have it easy either.

For matters pertaining to his family at least, the clear answer that Lex kept coming to was returning to earth and confronting them. But at the same time, he didn't want to see his family either. It was an exhausting range of emotions.

In the end, he decided to get some sleep, and then think more about the matter when he woke up. Besides, he had other things to do - he couldn't spend all his time on this.

He teleported to his apartment and then let out a deep, exhausted sigh. He closed his eyes and let himself feel the mental exhaustion for a moment, before he opened his eyes again and removed his shirt. A nice shower would make his sleep even better.

But, as soon as he removed his shirt, and before he could do something else, the sound of fake coughing filled the room.

Lex froze, his vigilance rising to the maximum, and panic bells ringing in his head. He scanned the room with his spirit sense and checked with his intuition, but got no response.

The sound of someone clearing their throat sounded from a corner in his room, this time much louder and clearer.

Slowly, as if not to cause alarm, Lex turned towards the corner from where the sound emerged.

There, on an unfamiliar maroon leather sofa, a dark figure was sitting waiting for him. Though Lex was looking right at him, he could not detect any of his features, and could not feel his presence, despite the fact that he was looking right at him.

Suddenly, with a thought, he equipped the Host Attire, but still he could not detect the figure in the corner of his room.

"You're a very interesting fellow, Lex Williams," the figure said, after clearing his throat once more.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 500: Enigmatic figure

"You're a very interesting fellow, Lex Williams," said the figure. Lex could not focus on the figure itself, so it was the maroon leather sofa upon which it sat that became Lex's focus. After checking the sofa with every sense available to him, and being unable to detect it, Lex's mind started working in another direction.

He had no reason to believe that he had been exposed, or that someone could magically overcome the system's functions. As such, the most logical answer is that the figure does not exist, and that he is either hallucinating or dreaming. The most likely culprit is either the emperor or one of his siblings. The fact that they made a move against him is the worst-case scenario...

"No, no, no, no, no! Don't go down that path, it's a mental headache. I am not a hallucination, I assure you. I am very much real."

Lex gulped as his nerves became even tighter. The fact that the hallucination can react to his thoughts...

The figure sighed and, while Lex could not be sure, he imagined that the figure facepalmed.

"Let's start from the beginning. Why don't you take a seat first? Let's have a discussion like civilized folk."

Lex did not need to sit down. The moment the man spoke, Lex had automatically gone from standing in his room to sitting on a beige leather sofa, opposite to the mysterious figure. As much as he wanted to use the strange transition as more proof that he was hallucinating, he was suddenly filled with the belief that this was all very real. In fact, it was not belief, it was knowledge - for belief can be wrong but facts cannot.

At some point, when Lex had not noticed, they had moved out of Lex's room. Instead, it looked like Lex was sitting in a small wooden cabin, lit only by a single oil lantern.

"Have you calmed down?" the man asked.

But the moment he finished the question, Lex's emotions had already stabilized, as if his body itself did not dare to waste the figures' time. Since he wished that Lex believe this was not a hallucination, it had

become so. Since he wanted Lex to calm down before they began their discussion, Lex's emotions were swept away.

But that was a good thing for Lex, at least for now. With a calm mind, Lex could think a lot more clearly, and analyze the situation a lot better. He did not know who the man was, or what he wanted, but suffice to say, if he meant Lex any harm, then Lex would already be dead. The difference between them... Lex could not even begin to understand it.

"Yes, I've calmed down," Lex answered, using his Innkeeper demeanor. No matter what, he was still the Innkeeper and a man of dignity and pride, even if the charade he had put up had come to an end.

"Who are you? How did you get here?" Lex asked, wanting to know the basic information at least. He had a feeling that the man would answer his questions.

"Me? I don't feel like doing proper introductions at this point, so I'll just introduce myself as the original owner of the Regal Embrace. As for how I got to you? The answer is, I really didn't. I'm sitting in my lounge, and you're in your room. But since I wanted to talk to you, I did a little trick."

The owner of Regal Embrace? Lex did not feel any surprise, for his emotions were completely stuck being absolutely calm. The information made sense. A being powerful enough to own the Regal Embrace would most definitely be strong enough to find him within the system, right? Lex wondered if he was above the Dao lord realm. Probably.

"But the focus for today, Lex, is not me, no. It's you. You really have managed to pull off something remarkable. Surpassing the Regal Embrace, I really didn't think it could be done. And don't try to be humble about it, there's nothing more annoying than false modesty. You may have had a lot of help along the way, but trust me, yours is not nearly the strongest system in the universe."

"Thank you," was all Lex said. There was no point in trying to probe or manipulate the conversation with this figure. So instead, Lex decided to wait to hear what it is the figure wanted.

"Oh don't be like that. Oh wait, your emotions are stuck. Young man, return to your normal self. It's not entertaining for me if I don't get any reactions at all."

Lex's emotions, which had been held back as if by a dam, came rushing back. But now was not the time for that! With a single thought, Lex entered the Overdrive state and took hold of his thoughts.

"How did you discover that I surpassed the Regal Embrace? Is there a spying system within the technique? Or can you spy on me through the system?"

"Neither child, neither. It's my eyes, you see. There are no secrets in front of them. Ah but I better get to the point quickly, you're wasting your rewards without even knowing about it. As the original owner of the Regal Embrace, I had some karma with it, so when a change occurred, I immediately felt it. I didn't mind you using my technique, but when you surpassed it, I was genuinely surprised, so I decided to give you a prize.

"You're lost and alone, trying to figure out everything on your own, so I decided to answer some of your questions. The number of questions depends on the value of your achievement as I feel like it, so if you keep asking mundane questions, you'll be wasting your reward. Feel free to ask any questions, boy. You won't have a better time than now to learn the answers."

In his overdrive state, with his emotions suppressed, Lex was able to focus on what mattered at the moment instead of trying to process the information. He asked the first question that came to his mind, a question he had been wondering for a long time.

"What is the true purpose of my system?"