

## Innkeeper 51

### The Innkeeper

#### Chapter 51: Change of plans

Lex clicked on the article to read more. The article was on a small blog site where the author interviewed some people who claimed to be present when the 'assassination' took place. According to the unnamed sources, they were present at an auction where an unlisted item was being sold. Supposedly it was a golden key that unlocked some kind of hidden heritage of an ancient cultivator. Alexander bought the keys but before he could get his hands on them he was attacked and robbed, before the assailants escaped the auction house. That was how the event started, and in anger Alexander's family deployed their private military force and were hunting the assassins all over Egypt. Even the A.D.F. was too afraid to step in.

The article continued to speculate on a few other things, but Lex and Larry both were too caught up in their thoughts to continue reading. Lex knew for a fact that Alexander was alive, so he took most of the article with a grain of salt, but he was thinking about the golden key. It had been auctioned? Which probably meant that Bastet wasn't the one who gave Alexander the keys, but auctioned them off instead. Did a cultivator at her level run short on money? What was going on?

"This is much worse than I expected," Larry murmured as he took out his phone and made a call. Unfortunately for him, whoever he was calling didn't pick up which agitated him further.

"What do you mean?" Lex asked.

"Alexander Morrison, do you know who that is? He's the heir to Mars. His family literally owns Mars. There's even some speculation that they've already started mining the various moons of the different planets in the solar system as well. There are even rumors that their family is harvesting spirit energy directly from the sun to create cultivators even stronger than Golden Core. Not only is his family rich, they have more Golden Core cultivators than any other force in the solar system. Of course, combined all the other forces are stronger, but who would be crazy enough to ally against them? If someone really has managed to kill Alexander, then things won't end as simply as a lockdown. This could lead to war."

Larry continued to make phone calls, but whoever he was calling still wasn't answering.

"Don't put too much trust in this article," Lex said, aware that Alexander was alive. "This isn't even a proper news site. It's just another conspiracy. How can it be easy to assassinate someone that important? He must have been surrounded by bodyguards."

"I hope you're right. If this..." before he could continue whoever he was calling picked up and started talking. Larry didn't speak and only listened. A few moments later he shut the phone and breathed a sigh of relief.

"You were right, the article wasn't true. Or at least, the part about Alexander being dead isn't true."

Lex raised an eyebrow. "You must have some insane contacts if they can tell you about what actually happened. Even Blue Bird hasn't released a statement yet."

Larry froze, realizing that he had lost his composure and exposed a little too much. He let out a defeated laugh and his shoulder slouched, as if letting go of a pretense.

"I guess there's no point in hiding anything. It's not like it's much of a secret anyway. The only reason you haven't heard is because you're still too new to the cultivation world. Originally, I come from a cultivation family as well - the Dershaw family. We used to own a few spirit stone mines here on Earth, and ran the Dershaw Bank. When I was growing up I even met Alexander a few times. Our families partnered up in various business ventures. Unfortunately, a few years ago there was an explosion in one of the mines. A lot of the elders from my family went to investigate, but never returned. I don't know the exact details of what happened, but most of the people in my family died that day. Afterwards, a few Sects showed up, saying that the Dershaw Bank had taken loans from them and it was time to pay it back. All the mines were seized and my family was imprisoned. They probably would have killed my entire family, me included, but the ICPA's intervened. My family was accused of a lot of crimes and banished to somewhere on the Moon. I was left behind because I hadn't started cultivating yet. So yeah, that's my story. I still have a few contacts who help me out occasionally secretly, but that's about it."

Lex froze after listening to Larry's story, unsure of how he should respond. He was not expecting Larry to unload something so heavy.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know," Lex said awkwardly but Larry waved it off, returning to his energetic and jovial self. "It's old news, don't worry about it. Instead of that, do you know what I found out recently? You remember Matilda, she took a couple of classes with us before she started getting private classes. I heard she's already Body Tempering 4th level. When I heard I was completely blown away. What a woman..."

Larry continued talking about Matilda and Lex smiled warily. This guy...

\*\*\*\*\*

Alexander continued to absorb the energy in the Core for a few more hours until it was eventually depleted. It took him a few minutes to adjust his state and check his body for any abnormalities. When he finally got up he was exhilarated! The effects of the Core were beyond anything he'd used before.

He left his room and returned to the Gift Shop where Velma appeared behind the counter as soon as he entered.

"Good day, dear guest," she said, her voice soft and pleasant to hear. "I hope you are enjoying your stay with us. Please let me know if there is anything you need."

"My stay has been incredible, but unfortunately I have some tasks I need to complete so I need to leave. Is it possible for me to have a word with the Innkeeper?"

Mary, who was aware of everything that was happening in the Inn told Lex, but with Larry in his apartment it was inconvenient for him to leave so he told her to handle the situation. Mary then mentally passed her a few instructions to Velma, who told Alexander, "The Innkeeper is away on some business at the moment. If there's something I can help you with then do please let me know."

"In that case, I would like to ask you to take care of Helen while I am away. If she needs further treatment you can charge it on my card, and once she is better please allow her to stay in my room till I come back. I'd also like 5 more Tier 3 Cores, 1 Tier 4 Core and a spare Golden Key."

"Of course," Velma said, handing Alexander the 6 cards containing his items as well as the key. The five Tier 3 Cores cost 7500MP, the Tier 4 core 5000MP and the Golden Key 100MP, although since he was technically buying the key directly from the Inn and not from Lex, Lex would get no profit from it. All in all, Lex received another 12,500 MP from Alexander though the young man seemed to think nothing of the cost.

As for charging his card? Even random websites could save credit card information, how could the Midnight Inn not be able to do the same? The query for how would the Inn receive the payments from the bank? It was using an ancient mystical technique called "This is definitely not a plot hole" to carry out the transactions. It left no traces behind and could not be tracked.

Done with his tasks, Alexander promptly returned to Earth. It was deep into the night in Egypt at this point, and the street where Alexander returned was dark. The streetlights had been damaged in the brief battle that took place earlier, not to mention from the arrival of the Titans pods.

Alexander took out a phone from pocket and made a video call. On his screen appeared a young man, though despite his youth he wore a look of experience and maturity.

"You're back," the man said. "When your tracker suddenly disappeared I was worried. The Titans have been sweeping the city for you but no one could find you."

"Yes, I encountered something unexpected. We're going to have to make a few changes to the plan. I need to come back to Mars immediately."

"What?" asked the man, surprised. "Are you sure? You've been planning for this for years."

"Yeah Dad," Alexander said. Surprisingly the young man in the video call was Alexander's father, though if you consider that when someone reaches a higher cultivation level their aging seems to slow or even stop, it wasn't that big a deal. "Something big has happened. You can release the news that I've been poisoned with some new kind of poison. Also, let a few rumors slip that Helen is dead. As for the details of what actually happened...I better wait till I reach Mars. You should also call Grandfather. I feel like he'll be interested in this too."

When Alexander mentioned his grandfather, his father's demeanor completely changed and he simply nodded, as if understanding that this matter was unordinary.

"Also, have someone look into Marlo's recent actions. I'll see you soon." With that he ended the call and left the area. He seemed completely unaffected by the fact that his previous actions had shaken the entire world. Someone would naturally take care of any fallout.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 52: Gossip

Somewhere deep in the Sahara desert, a lone stranger was walking in the shade of a dune, following the directions of a strange compass. The compass did not point North, but was instead guiding the man towards something specific. Eventually the man reached a point where the compass pointed directly downwards. Not wasting any time, the man set up a tent at that exact location before entering. Once inside and out of view, he removed the needle of the compass and let it fall into the sand. The needle, as if sentient, began moving downward and the man followed using a spirit technique that let him traverse through the ground.

After a few minutes of going down he encountered a strange shield made of energy - formally known as a Formation - but the needle made a hole in the shield just large enough for the man to pass through.

Once inside the formation the man increased his descent speed until he reached an underground bunker. Once inside he removed the white cloth he had wrapped around his face, along with the other gear he was wearing and changed into some comfortable robes that he had brought with himself. Not wasting any time he moved deeper into the bunker to what looked like a conference room. All the seats in the conference room were already filled, mostly with holograms but a few with people actually present.

"Do you have the news?" one of the projected men asked.

"Yes yes," the robed man answered. "Plan A and B failed, however according to what I heard Plan C seems to have successfully passed the initial stage. Alexander has been poisoned and is retreating to Mars in an emergency vessel, probably to treat the poison. The Helen girl is dead, so for now they will turn their attention towards the Sigmund family. The infiltration was done cleanly, so there is no evidence that anyone outside of the Sigmund family contacted her. They will be the prime suspects, which should occupy all of the Morrison families attention. Greg Benice was also killed and even though the Benice family has no idea how he got involved in this, I'm sure they won't hesitate in handing over all of Greg's immediate family to the Morrisons and cooperating with their investigation completely. All-in-all, it should serve to waste more time. The Zeus Leventis kid however...he has disappeared for now. No one knows where he is, and the Leventis family has reacted unexpectedly. The current Leventis family head has left directly for Mars, his intentions are yet unknown but considering Zeus' role in the assassination, going directly to Mars is a bold play."

"If the Morrisons take their anger out on them it'll be great, but if they don't it still doesn't matter," said one of the holograms. "They're not connected to us in any way. What I'm curious about is how the A.D.F. matter will be handled? No one expected the kid to directly deploy troops on Earth, I can't even

begin to imagine what he would have done had he not been poisoned. The reaction was too swift. We will need to be even more careful proceeding forward."

"I've already handled the matter. Some key personnel have been killed and it's been made to look like suicide. Upon investigation it'll look like they panicked when their plan failed and so took their own lives to hide their trail. No matter how it's investigated, it'll be a deadend. You do not need to waste your time fretting over these details. What matters now is that everyone begins their part in the plan. The top powers on Earth are too secretive, we still cannot figure out how or why, but in the last 200 years anyone who caused too much trouble on Earth has mysteriously vanished. Taking over Mars is our only chance for freedom...and our only chance to break through! There can't be any mistakes!"

"You don't need to tell me," said a lazy voice from a different hologram. "You've only been working here for a few years. We've been preparing for this from the day the Morrison family landed on Mars. As for the rest of you, we need to step up on recruitment..." the meeting continued as everyone in the room began coordinating on the different steps required for their plan. Unknown to everyone, the fate of billions was being decided casually in this bunker under the desert.

\*\*\*\*\*

Lex and Larry had gotten to know each other quite well in the few hours that they were together in the apartment. From him Lex had also learned a lot about the different organizations in the spirit world, along with correcting some misconceptions he had. For some reason, he always thought that joining an organization was like getting a job at a company. They would give him benefits but make him work in exchange. This was true for a lot of them, but not all. One in particular that aroused Lex's interest was called Ballor's Castle. This was an organization made by, and solely for rogue or lone cultivators. Their main purpose, first and foremost, was to provide protection to its members and then secondly it had a lot of miscellaneous services. Joining also had different levels. If you joined as a basic member, then as long as you were in the territory owned by Ballor's Castle, they would protect you regardless of who was your enemy, even ICPA. For this level of membership you weren't expected to do anything else, but they heavily promoted helping other members if you ever met them. For higher level members there were obviously more perks, but then of course you had to make a relevant level of contribution. This is what Lex found most interesting. The contribution could be in many forms, and thus it was very flexible. This organization was Internationally founded and had almost a dozen Golden Core leaders across the globe. It was something that could be very helpful to Lex, and he jotted down its name in case he ever wanted to join.

Larry had also learned a lot from Lex, though Lex sort of regretted sharing. At some point during Larry's incessant prodding Lex had let slip that he had only ever had one girlfriend, during his first year at college. The fact that Lex hadn't dated after that led Larry to weave a tale of a heartbroken Lex, forever

ping after his one true love, lost to the materialist allure of modern society. Lex balked, but who had told him to share?

Eventually the conversation changed towards their self defense class, and then Marlo. This was when, for the first time in his life, Lex participated in gossip excitedly. The owner of Ultimate Fighting Fortress was Marlo's wife! It was apparently something that was commonly known but Lex had only found out through Tempest. Nobody knew why there was apparently such enmity between husband and wife, and Larry shared a few outlandish stories he had heard online. The hours went by quickly and the two did not even notice their growing friendship, until late at night when Blue Bird released another broadcast ending the house arrest and returning things to normal. Reluctantly Larry left, for he had much work he needed to do. Oddly enough, Lex found that he had enjoyed the company of the over enthusiastic fellow. But there was no reluctance on his part, he couldn't wait for Larry to leave. He did not miss the new addition to his MP, and he was practically dying to upgrade his Inn!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 53: Disappointment

Lex immediately returned to the Inn and excitedly asked Mary, "What happened? Where did all this MP come from? Who was it?"

The tiny tologram appeared before, sparkling as she glittered and sparkled while gliding through the air, clearly infected by Lex's emotions. "It was Alexander! He bought the zombie cores and left Helen in our care, saying that he'd be back soon."

Lex was slightly disappointed that Alexander had left, but he couldn't care at this point. Finally he had a decent amount of MP to spend and he knew exactly how he wanted to spend it. Flying high into the air he looked down at the Inn, deciding where exactly he wanted to make some changes. After a few moments of consideration he flew over to the west where he'd created some hills earlier. He made the hills higher and added trees and shrubbery across them, but built a smooth yet winding path through them. At the peak of the highest hill he created flatland dusted with various wild flowers. In the middle he put the one building he'd had his eye on for a while now, the Meditation room! It cost him 1200MP, along with another 300MP for the remodeling of the hills but it was a necessary expenditure. All of his guests so far had been cultivators, and though they seemed satisfied with the amenities so far, how could they not be provided a place to cultivate?

The Meditation room was at level 1, which meant it provided only the most basic of advantages for now but that was enough for the moment. On the outside it looked like a hut, but the inside would change according to whoever was using it and would create the most relaxing environment. It provided a higher concentration of spirit energy, and made it easier for people to enter meditation and focus. There was a

slight boost to the users comprehension - meaning anything they were contemplating or meditating on would be easier for them to understand. The Meditation room could only host one user at a time, but if he ever needed more he'd create them as necessary. The use of it cost him nothing, so he decided to price it at 100MP a day. This would be a great attraction, Lex imagined, for his guests. He'd noticed that a lot of them spent some time cultivating or meditating in their room. A specific place that would provide a boost would be even better.

Done with his little side project, Lex grinned and did what he had truly been waiting for! He paid 5000MP for his cultivation upgrade! His new total was instantly brought down to 8241MP but he didn't care. It was still a lot, and he'd really been waiting to elevate his cultivation. He closed his eyes and waited to be transported to the white room and...nothing!

After waiting a bit more, he asked Mary in a confused tone, "What's happening? Does the Inn need to prepare to elevate my cultivation?"

"Not exactly," she replied after a moment, as if communicating with the Inn. "Your body hasn't settled down from your first procedure. You underwent a major change, and although it seems like you are fine, your body has not reached the optimal stage to undergo the next procedure. Don't think of this as a video game in which you can upgrade whenever you want, things need to be done step by step. When your body has stabilized and is ready for the next procedure the Inn will let you know. If you want to speed up the process, rigorously exerting yourself and then fully recovering will hasten your body's stabilization. On the bright side, since you've already paid the price for the upgrade you won't need to worry about it when you're ready."

Lex groaned. Of course, his system would never make things easy. Other MC's had systems that made them OP instantly. Other MC's could instantly rule their worlds. He on the other hand had to continuously train and get beat up by a made giant and fight zombies senselessly. The news was disappointing, and it made a dent in his plans. He needed to consider what to do for now. He could slowly take his time, and wait till he's ready and then upgrade before returning to Vegus Minima to drop more Golden Keys. But he didn't want to go back to that zombie infested land till he was stronger. Little did he know that he had only encountered the lowest of the low zombies on that planet. If he had landed in the same place as Marlo he would never have survived. Another option was to use the third Golden Ticket when it was ready. It was another thing he wanted to put off till he was stronger, but it seemed that might take too long.

Although there was no rush really, Lex could take all the time in the world, he didn't like being excessively lazy. After thinking for a while, he made up his mind. He was already experienced at going to another world, he would be better prepared this time around. It seemed like it was time to expand his customer base to another world!

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 54: Shopping

Having made up his mind, Lex first checked up on his guests to see how they were doing. Hugo was still in his room, stabilizing his new realm. Marlo was still undergoing a process of healing and being corroded by his own blood, while Helen was almost completely cured. The only reason Helen hadn't been cured by now, in fact, was because she'd had the poison in her system so long it had seeped into her brain and affected it, healing which was a slow and delicate process. Still, she'd be out soon. Lex instructed Velma to stay by her side and to give her a tour once everything was done.

With that he was done for now. He considered adding the Guild room to the Inn as well, it only cost 1000MP, but he decided to wait till he had more guests frequenting his Inn. There was no shortage of things he could buy, for example he could make Gerard and Velma permanent instead of keeping them on their temporary one month lease, but he still had a few more weeks left for that. He was planning on making the change closer to their end date, that way he'd keep some MP incase of an emergency - failing that Marlo quest really affected him.

He returned to his apartment and slept for a few hours before getting up at the break of dawn to go and exercise. He'd need to keep exerting himself if he wanted to speed up his body's stabilization process. He strapped some weights onto his body and went out for a run. At around 9 am he messaged Larry, asking him if he knew where he could quickly buy some gear. Larry replied with a location, asking Lex to meet him there in an hour. Unexpectedly, it was the Javits Center. A lot of large events took place there, and Lex had visited the place himself a few times during comic con. He really wasn't expecting such a public place to have anything to do with cultivators - it really took hiding in plain sight to another level.

Lex showered and left immediately, quickly reaching his destination but arriving early was pointless as he still ended up waiting for Larry to arrive. When the exuberant young Larry arrived he looked much better than yesterday, with no sign of the many bruises he had earlier. Whether it was makeup or medicine that did the job, Lex could not tell at all.

"What kind of gear are you looking for?" Larry asked after they greeted each other.

"Survival gear, body armor, weapons. I'll have to look at what's available, it really depends on what's available and what I can afford. Normally I'd ask Marlo, but he's away and God only knows when he'll be back."

"No no, it's a good thing you asked me instead. Not that Marlo wouldn't be able to help you out, but you really need to mix a little more with other cultivators. You need to be able to do things on your own incase you're ever in a pinch."

Larry led the way, all the while telling Lex that he needed to expose himself more to the cultivation world and not be a recluse. When the two got in an elevator that led them deep into a basement Lex was not surprised at all, as he seemed to understand that this would be a continuing pattern in New York.

When he exited the elevator he entered a large hall that looked identical to the one on the ground floor, and with the same AR technology used everywhere else it looked like they were out in the open instead of deep underground.

"Welcome to the main trading center for anything cultivator related in all of New York. Here, you can find anything from weapons to armor to med kits, spirit tech, cultivation techniques, spirit techniques to literally anything you can imagine as well as many things you can't imagine. The stalls are set up by individuals, organizations, companies, colleges, think tanks - basically anyone with anything to sell! And the security here is all maintained by Bluebird, and they're very thorough so you don't need to be afraid that you'll be robbed or ripped off. It might be slightly pricier than if you buy things from Marlo, but you'll get a whole lot more options as well!"

Lex was amazed by the giant underground market. Larry did not embellish at all, just from where he was standing he could see more variety in things for sale than he ever saw on the Bluebird portal.

"Listen, I'm sure you can handle yourself from here. I have a few chores I need to run myself," Larry spoke, less enthused than usual, but Lex didn't mind.

"Go ahead, thanks for bringing me here. I'll take my time looking at things so I might take a while anyway."

And indeed, Lex spent quite a few hours there. At first he only looked through all the stalls. Contrary to what he expected, most things being sold had less to do with combat and cultivation and more to do with luxury or day to day convenience. Fashion was also something that was given a lot of importance, as a lot of apparel was being sold - with the added bonus that the clothes won't accidentally rip due to your increased strength. In the end, Lex could not help himself and bought himself a lot of sportswear as well as camouflaged armor for his legs as well as his upper body. He bought himself glasses that had automatic night vision as well as zoom, a backpack that could resist ripping from the strength of an

average body cultivator, high calorie rations, a wrist watch that would automatically create a map of anywhere he went when turned on, all terrain boots, protective gloves and, unbelievably, deodorant for cultivators! It did not have a nice smell like other deodorants, but instead eliminated any and all smells on his body so that he could not be tracked. He bought various books on combat and survival, and for the cheap, cheap price of \$12 million he bought two generic cultivation techniques that went up to the peak of Qi Training. He wanted them for reference, so that he could understand how regular people cultivated and how it differed from Regal Embrace. Finally, he also bought a short sword and a dagger, both strengthened beyond regular cold weapons.

He did not have to carry bags as he shopped as all the items would be delivered to his apartment within the day, so he explored the market freely. When he felt satisfied that he had seen everything that could be offered here, he sent Larry a message and left. Everything he bought was in preparation for his next adventure to a new world, it would only be a couple more days till the next Golden Ticket was available for use.

\*\*\*\*\*

Deep in a forest in Vegus Minima the sounds of battle echoed. A swift and merciless man cut through a small horde of zombies, using no weapons other than his bare hands. His trained body knew exactly how to move to avoid getting attacked, while giving him the vantage to attack as he pleased. In but a few minutes the horde was reduced to nothing but a pile of dead bodies and the man wasted no time in recovering the cores from their bodies. Just as he was removing the core from the last body, another man appeared behind, emitting an even stronger aura of bloodlust.

"Any signs?" the first man asked, not bothering to look back.

"Nothing yet," the second man answered.

If Lex saw them now he would be thoroughly surprised to find these two incredibly ferocious men were Brother Chen and Blane, his two Pro Bono guests. The surprise would be because while they were at the Inn they behaved so meekly, but once they were back to their own world their true, battle hardened selves were revealed.

Blane, who took out the last zombie core, frowned as he heard Brother Chen's words. When they returned from the Inn they came back to the same place that they had made their final stand against the Tier 3 zombie. Finding their way back to the caravan should not have been a problem for them at all, especially since they were both good at tracking. However the caravan had mysteriously disappeared.

No matter how they looked, they could not even find the caravans trail let alone the caravan itself. Even if the caravan was destroyed by zombies there should have been some signs of battle. Yet there was nothing. It was as if they were teleported, much in the same way the two soldiers had been teleported to the Inn.

"Rest up. Come dawn, we'll continue our search. This time, we'll try to be quiet and avoid fighting, it wastes too much time. If we're unable to find the caravan in the next few days, I think we should return to the Inn and see if they have something that can help us."

Blane only nodded, grimacing. 'I hope you're okay Iris', he thought. 'You have to be.'

The Innkeeper

Chapter 55: 'Tom'

The next day during Lex's early morning workout Mary informed him that Helen had been completely healed. However, since she had woken up she had not spoken with anyone and had asked to be left alone. She had been sitting in the lawn behind the Inn, looking forlorn and lost in thought. Since she wanted to be left alone Lex did not disturb her, but instructed Mary to have a Saturn cake sent to her when she was feeling better. Lex did not know if there were other things on her mind, but coming so close to death would definitely traumatize anyone. Although he'd be paying for the cake himself, he considered it a little gift to Alexander for all his spending - not to mention it would give him a good idea of how effective the Saturn cake was at making the eater feel euphoric.

With that he put her out of his thoughts and continued his training. He also tried to look up other information about what happened in Egypt, but there were only rumors online. He also finally met up with Elaine and Harry, his friends from his previous job. Giving as little detail as possible he filled them in on his new job and asked them how things were going at their old place. He was particularly interested in what Jessica, his old boss, was up to but his friends mistook his interest as romantic. Elaine and Harry shared a secret look, but Lex missed it and was thus completely unaware that his friends had started considering how to get Lex and Jessica together for a romantic rendezvous. Lex also finally got around to having a video call with his family, taking particular care in letting them know that New York was not a place they'd be interested in visiting and should not consider doing so. His youngest sister, Moon, was behaving especially suspicious during the call but Lex couldn't be bothered to investigate.

Lex was basically checking all the chores he had been avoiding off his list before his travel to the new world. Last time he had been fortunate enough that he returned within a day, but there was no guarantee of such a thing happening again.

Finally, after all his waiting, he received a system notification:

Host can now use the Golden Ticket!

Without hesitation he summoned the ticket and tore it in half. The two pieces disappeared in a shining light and a panel appeared before his eyes.

Planets Available:

Planet: Nibiru

Planet Rating: 1 Star

Planet Distance: 3 Sectors

Planet Environment: Extremely Vibrant

Planet: Dunya

Planet Rating: 5 Stars

Planet Distance: 8 Sectors

Planet Environment: Extremely dense spiritual energy

These were the only two planets available this time around, but before Lex could get a good read on he received another notification.

New Quest: Host has encountered a planet extremely suitable for finding guests. Build a connection to Dunya!

Quest Time limit: None!

Quest Reward: 1 Free Inn upgrade!

Remarks: Please wash your face before going to Dunya. The system will be embarrassed if it is associated with a dirty looking fellow!

Lex's lips twitched, and he felt like beating someone up. He had been waiting for a quest, but it was a good thing that this quest had no time limit as there was no way he'd be going to a 5 Star world with his current cultivation. A 1 star world had almost killed him. This would be something for the future. Without wasting any further time he selected Nibiru and disappeared.

Lex was extremely tense when he reappeared, and quickly analyzed his surroundings for any threats! Fortunately, his arrival this time was different from last. He found himself standing alone in the middle of a wide, dirt road on a plateau. It seemed like early morning, and the pleasant weather and cool breeze welcomed Lex like a fond friend. Some distance on his left there seemed to be a forest, but on his right down the plateau Lex could see some farmers working in what looked like rice fields.

Lex relaxed a little, and moved his hand away from the Heavy Harley that he was wearing on his hip. The short sword that he had recently bought was strapped to his back, and his dagger in his boot. He was wearing his defensive, camouflage gear as well as his new backpack so he stood out like a nail in this very rural environment, but he was more concerned with his immediate security rather than attracting attention. Making sure that nothing was amiss, he sent the bathroom slipper back into the system inventory. But since he was wearing boots, how was he also wearing the slippers? Well Lex had realized that he didn't really need to be wearing the slippers on his feet for them to have an effect, only have them on his body. So he used a spare lace he had in his apartment and tied both ends onto one slipper each, then hung the slippers around his neck. It looked hideous but it was more practical. Not to mention no one saw it so it didn't really matter.

Just as he was about to move, he heard rustling from the forest and looked just in time to see a ruffled young man running out of the forest, completely out of breath. The young man was wearing what looked like scholar's robes, something very unfit for running, and had numerous scratches on his somewhat dirty face. Glee could be seen on his face when he exited the forest, and scurried towards the road. Yet when the boy noticed Lex on the road he froze, gripped with shock and horror.

The both of them stood facing one another a few feet apart, analyzing the other. Lex was dressed too peculiarly, and judging by the other face he could tell that all sorts of assumptions were being made about him. It would be better to take control of the situation before something unexpected happened.

"Hello there friend," Lex spoke warmly with a smile, "My name is Lex. I seem to have gotten lost. Could you point me towards the nearest town or village? I would appreciate it."

The young man gathered himself up when he heard Lex speak. The fear on his face disappeared, but suspicion clearly painted his face. Clearly whatever he had originally assumed about Lex was wrong, but he could not judge the truthfulness of his words.

"My name is Tif- no, Tom. You can call me Tom," he said. Or rather, she said. The moment she spoke Lex could tell it was a girl, her voice a clear give away. She had disguised herself well, not to mention her short hair and dirty face adding to it. But once Lex realized, it became obvious that this wasn't really a boy. "You'll only find farmers here. The nearest village is two days away by a donkey cart. You only need to follow the road. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to be leaving."

'Tom' fixed up her robes and started strutting down the road as if she had nothing to hide, though her unusually quick pace spoke otherwise.

"Are you alright, Tom? Do you need any help?" Lex asked, amused.

"No, I mean yes, I am completely alright. I am very, very alright. I don't need any help. I completely do not need help at all..." just as Tom was speaking, four men dressed completely in black broke out of the forest in a fury. They were holding daggers in their hands, and as soon as they saw Tom and Lex they yelled and attacked.

Before Tom could react Lex picked her up and started running, a grin on his face. Tom, taken by surprise, yelled, but quickly stopped when she heard Lex say, "Are you sure you're totally completely alright? You don't even need a little help?"

The four pursuers were mortals and thus would not be able to keep up with Lex's pace, so he felt no pressure at all. He could have also fought them, but he didn't want to fight - and potentially kill - random people for no reason at all. More importantly, Tom's bad acting and disheveled appearance filled Lex with the urge to tease her. But most importantly, he received another notification from the system:

New Quest: You have encountered someone carrying the will of the world Nibiru. Protect their safety and help them complete their task to gain goodwill from Nibiru.

Quest Reward: Depends on time taken to complete. The quicker the completion, the better the reward!

Quest failure punishment: Drastic drop of luck whilst in Nibiru! -1000MP (if the host is unable to pay, it will result in immediate death)!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 56: Red Nation

Although he was being chased, Lex felt no pressure at all as his physique had improved immensely. Even when carrying the girl in his arms he felt at ease.

"You're...you're kidnapping me!" stammered Tom with a flustered expression.

"Oh? Should I put you down then?" he asked, smirking.

Tom leaned over to look behind Lex's shoulder and saw their pursuers. Although they had started lagging behind, they were very much still in their view.

"Kidnap me faster," Tom said finally, deciding that the men in black were scarier.

Lex let out an amused laugh and picked up his pace. For some reason he found this young girl to be very adorable and instinctually wanted to help her. Only a few minutes later the men in black had stopped chasing as they were completely out of breath, and Lex had left them far behind.

"Run into the field," Tom said. "I know a good place."

Lex listened to the girl's instructions and followed where she directed. Soon he found himself in the wild, far away from any indication of civilization. Ultimately they stopped by a small creek with a hidden tunnel and that began from the base of the tree. Tom, climbing out of Lex's embrace, led Lex into the

tunnel before covering the entrance with a wooden board. The tunnel was not dark however, as luminescent flora lined the walls. Eventually the tunnel opened up to a small yet cosy room with a few chairs, a cot, a table and a LOT of books!

Tom sat herself down on one of the chairs before she started breathing raggedly, as if she had been the one running. Then she did an action to indicate she was wiping the sweat off her brow, before turning to look at Lex.

"You are welcome," she said, her voice loud and magnanimous. "If I hadn't told you where to go you would have probably kept on running on the road and then the bad guys would have caught you."

Lex's lips twitched. It seemed he had a knack for finding unusual people. "Thank you, but I get the feeling they were more interested in you than in me."

As soon as he said that Tom's face grimaced, her hands clenched into fists.

"Do you need any help?" Lex found himself asking.

"Those bad men want to hurt the Lord Protector! Father Henry found out about them, but before he could tell anyone they came to hurt him. He wrote a letter and told me to take it to the capital, but before I could do anything those bad guys started chasing after me. If I don't take the letter to the capital soon, they might end up hurting Lord Protector!"

"In that case, let me take you to the capital. We shouldn't waste time sitting around here, we should be moving."

Lex needed to help the girl with her task for his quest, not to mention she seemed very upfront so would be a great source of information about this world.

Tom hesitated. "Why do you want to help me? If you stay with me, those bad guys will come after you as well."

"Of course, it's for the Lord Protector!" Lex boldly claimed, having no idea who he was talking about at all. "How can I relax when I know someone wants to hurt the Lord Protector! Not to mention, I also need to go to the capital, and as I told you already, I'm kinda lost."

Tom was hesitating, deciding whether she could trust Lex, until she finally decided that if he wanted to hurt her he could have done it already.

"Okay, then we should go. But I need to rest a little first, I've been running all night. By the way, my name is Tiffany. I'm sorry I lied to you, I thought you were also a bad man."

"Haha I can't blame you. I am dressed a little strangely, anyone would be afraid. But these clothes are really good for traveling, which is why I'm wearing them."

After that little exchange Tiffany let her guard down, and Lex began asking her random questions to try and understand the world a little bit. He could not ask directly, but fortunately Tiffany did not think his questions were strange and answered him honestly.

First of all, he was in a country called Red Nation. Tiffany didn't know much about the world, but Red Nation shared a border with at least 3 other countries. Civilization on this planet seemed to be developed at the level of the middle ages on Earth, but there was one very prominent difference between Nibiru and Earth. Humans were one of the lowest on the food chain on this planet. This world was ruled by beasts, and humans did not seem to have any knowledge of cultivation at all. The countries weren't dictated according to the will of the people, but according to the territory of the Beast Alpha that occupied the lands. How the people of each country were treated was completely up to the will of the Beast Alpha, however it seemed the consensus was that humans made very good workers and soldiers. The people in Red Nation were treated relatively extremely well, but in some of the neighboring countries humans were completely treated as slaves.

This information was extremely shocking to Lex, and it left him with a strange bitter aftertaste in his mouth. All the humans on this entire planet, or at least in the nearby countries, lived at the mercy of beasts. Of the three worlds Lex had been on, he now realized how blessed he was that Earth was where he lived. To distract himself he asked Tiffany a little more about herself.

She was 13 years old, almost 14 now, and was raised by the priest she called Father Henry. Father Henry and his colleagues worked directly for the Lord Protector, and were given tasks that helped keep their country vibrant. After asking a few more questions, Lex came to the conclusion that the Lord Protector of Red Nation might not actually be a beast, but some kind of spirit plant that had gained sentience.

That was because all the priests of Red Nation were tasked with taking care of all the flora of the country, and often performed rituals that involved taking care of forests. From starting controlled fires, eliminating pests, spreading fertilizers, collecting or spreading seeds to many more tasks that Lex could not understand, all their actions had something to do with plants.

Fortunately for him, he also learned that humans were a protected class in Red Nation, which meant that as long as he stuck close to the roads he would not come under attack from spirit beasts. If they strayed too far into the wild, however, then their survival was in their own hands. As a mere Body Tempering cultivator, Lex decided that even if he had to risk running into those pursuers, he would promptly return to the main road once they left.

Eventually, after all that talking, Tiffany became drowsy and lay down for a nap. As soon as she woke up, they would leave and begin their new adventure.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 57: Idea

While Tiffany slept, Lex went through the books in the small room. Most of them were children's stories about heroic and magnanimous beasts helping and guiding the humans to safety. Others were on random subjects such as herbology or carpentry, to biographies of some Beast Alphas who had a great influence on humans, both for the better and worse. Naturally, Lex used the books as a database to feed his Fancy monacle with some knowledge of this world.

Furthermore, while a lot of the stories were surely fictional, Lex was able to piece out the history of this world, at least in regards to humans. They truly were at the lowest step of the food chain, living like nomads in the most desolate places to avoid wild beasts. At some point in history a few tribes either tried to domesticate, or rescued young beasts and raised them as a part of the tribe. The exact details could only be guessed, but the basic story was that the first time humans came out of hiding was when a Beast Alpha was born that considered itself a part of a human tribe.

It gave them territory and protected them, and allowed them to grow and prosper. Under their new found protection, humans thrived and prospered, and slowly started coming out of the stone age. They created villages and communities, and as their knowledge grew what they developed a symbiotic relationship with the Beasts that protected them. Their study of different environments as well as farming and medicine allowed them to aid the cultivation of not only the Beast Alphas, but Beasts of all cultivation stages. Slowly other Alpha's also learnt of the benefits of letting humans manage their territories, and thus humans went from being an almost extinct species on this planet to coveted workers. Of course each Alpha had a different way of using humans, but the trend had been established. This same trend had been going on for thousands and thousands of years, and the positions of humans

had been cemented at the bottom. Occasionally some lucky humans would encounter some spiritual fruits of treasures that would enhance and strengthen their bodies, making them stronger than mortals, but not only was such progress inconsistent and irreplicable, the benefit was not strong enough to give humans independent territory of their own.

All these details were simply what Lex had surmised from reading the various books, and could be wrong. He would have to investigate more to find out. And speaking of investigating...

"Hey Tiffany, wake up," Lex said as he woke up the young girl. It had been a couple of hours, and though he had no doubt that she could sleep more, he didn't want to waste anymore time. The quicker he helped her complete her task, the better his reward would be. And who knew how long it would take to get to the capital? Not to mention he doubted her pursuers would give up so easily.

Waking up the young girl was an ordeal of its own, but he finally managed to do it by telling her the longer they took the more danger the Lord Protector would be in. Then came an issue that Lex did not anticipate. The capital was likely far away so he asked if there was a place where they could get horses. That was where the issue came in, no one on this planet could conceive a human riding an animal or a beast. Even if it were a normal animal and not a spirit beast, riding atop it would antagonize any beast that saw it. Hunting for food was acceptable, enslaving or using for domestic purposes was not. That meant he would have to run all the way to the village, from where he could trade for a cycle. After some effort Lex convinced Tiffany to climb onto his back as he would be faster and departed at a light jog. Tiffany tried to guide him through the wild, insisting that she knew this place well enough to avoid any danger but Lex ignored her and directly returned towards the dirt road.

"Hey wait, head that way," Tiffany said excitedly from Lex's shortly after they left. They head towards a tree with its bark covered in some kind of vine. Not waiting to explain, Tiffany reached out and grabbed one of the vines, ripped one of the leaves in half and rubbed the sap all over her hands.

"You try it as well," she said, sniffing her hands with a smile. Lex, curious as to her intentions, did the same. When he rubbed the sap from the leaf on his hands he felt a cooling sensation entering his body from his hands, relaxing him. In a few moments he was completely refreshed, and the slight fatigue he had accumulated completely disappeared.

"Smell your hands," Tiffany said, still doing the same. Lex raised his hands expectantly and was welcomed by a pleasant aroma. It smelled similar to Night Jasmine, but more than the aroma Lex was enthralled by the cooling sensation he felt entering his brain. It lasted only a few seconds, but he was hooked.

"What is that?" Lex asked, breaking another leaf and squeezing the sap into his hands.

"I call it Tiffanys treasure, although I don't know what other people call it. I love the smell and it feels so good, and look, it's so good for the skin!" She showed him her hand where she previously had a scratch from last night, however the sap was visibly healing her hand. In a few minutes, there would be no trace of the wound having ever existed.

Watching her hand as if he was watching a miracle, Lex suddenly had an idea.

"Do you know what the seed for Tiffany's Treasure looks like?"

The young girl nodded, completely ignoring the fact that she was on his back and Lex could not see her. But at the moment, neither of them cared. They both were distracted by their own ideas.

\*\*\*\*\*

In a dark room a large, brown fox lay comfortably on an equally large pillow. There were no torches in the room, and the few windows had curtains drawn in front of them. There was no other furniture or other decoration in the room, as if the fox was supposed to be the only and main attraction. The silence was broken, however, by the sound of an opening door followed by a man dressed in black entering and sitting on his knees before the large fox.

"My lord, there's a report from the Eastern Temple in the Red Nation. All the priests have been captured, but a human child witnessed the event and escaped. So far we have been unable to capture the child."

The fox lazily opened a single eye and looked at the man in front of her, before saying, "tell me, are human children traditionally faster than the adults? They must be, otherwise why would none of your people be unable to capture the child?"

"No my lord! The child was just lucky! My men chased after the child, but in the darkness they were slowed down in the forest. A couple times they almost caught the child, but they happened to run into wild beasts and had to fend them off. In the end the child ran into another human who we believe has

taken a strengthening fruit. They were able to run away faster than my men could keep up. Fortunately the man did not know how to hide his tracks. My men are chasing after them as we speak. I believe in a few hours, both the child and man will be captured."

The fox looked at the desperate face the man before her was making, and thought for a few moments. Finally she said, "send word to the Brown Bari Wolf pack. Tell them I want the entire pack after the two humans. Also send word back to the Iron Mountains, tell them moving forward they should assume that details of our actions in Red Nation have been leaked. Speed up the infiltration, and don't hesitate to use drastic measures if necessary."

"But my lord," the man cried out, gripped in fear, "we can capture the two humans. We can! We won't let the news leak!"

"Even if you capture them now, there's no guarantee that they haven't spread the news already, or sent some kind of message. Since you lost sight of them, assume the news has already disseminated. Do not try to cover up your failures, and do not be afraid to make changes to the plan. Now go, I want to continue napping."

The man's entire body trembled as he accepted his orders, and left the room to carry out his orders. Compared to other spirit beasts, this fox was very calm and didn't bother with unnecessary details. But once news of his failure made its way back to the Iron Mountains, there was no way he would escape punishment, and in the Iron Mountains the lightest punishment for humans was death.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 58: Trouble

It had been a few hours since they left and despite slowing down occasionally to collect seeds or roots of some plants Lex thought had interesting uses, the duo had made good progress. Lex was traveling at a light jog so as to not exhaust his stamina, but speed up their journey. In fact, they were already in sight of a town from where Lex would be able to purchase a bicycle. As for how to make the payment...Lex was embarrassed to admit that he would have to borrow money from Tiffany, as he had no idea what kind of currency worked in this world. Fortunately the little girl had already assured him that she would be able to buy it.

The town was very different from what Lex was expecting. Most noticeably, it was extremely clean which was a great feat considering their limited technology. Even a lot of Manhattan wasn't as clean as this town appeared to be. There was no trash anywhere on the ground, the roads and streets were made of stone and the buildings made out of what looked like extremely large bricks. But despite the

apparent urbanization of the area, nature was also dominant in the city, with fruit trees every dozen or so feet and neat, trimmed gardens right beside the roads. The people were all dressed in cotton tunics and dresses, and moved about their way normally. If Lex didn't see the occasional giant Beast strolling the streets he could practically mistake it for Earth.

Still, as fascinating as it was, Lex didn't want to waste time admiring the town. The two found their way to the market and bought themselves a cycle. When it was time for payment, instead of paying Tiffany took out a medallion with the words Eastern Temple written on it. The man was incomparably excited when he saw the medallion, and replaced the cycle Lex had gotten with the best one he sold for no cost at all. Lex wanted to depart immediately but Tiffany insisted that they stop to eat. Lex tried to insist but who could win an argument against someone so young?

They entered what could be considered a lavish restaurant and ordered a vegetable soup and some fruit. Based on what Lex saw everyone was eating vegetables or fruit, with no meat to be seen anywhere. It made sense, with no domestication a stable meat source would be incredibly difficult to find. The two ate while chatting, ignoring all the strange looks Lex's attire was attracting as they had anticipated it.

"So does the token from the temple let you buy whatever you want?"

"Of course! The temple enacts the will of the Lord Protector, and everything in Red Nation naturally belongs to the Lord Protector. So it is not that I am not paying them, but rather they are just returning to me the property of the Lord Protector. But of course, I can't use the token to just take whatever I want. In the first place, it's not even mine, it's Father Henrys."

Tiffany seemed completely fine talking about the priest Father Henry, which Lex thought was slightly unusual. He was the man that raised Tiffany and had been captured by unknown people, shouldn't she be more concerned?

"Speaking of Father Henry, do you know why those people went after him? Even if they want to hurt the Lord Protector, I can't imagine some humans being able to hurt him."

"I don't know," she said, taking a bite out of what looked like a purple apple. "But they must be working for some other Beast. But even so, they can't hurt Father Henry. He's been marked by the Lord Protector, if he dies then the Lord Protector will know immediately."

That explained why she was so relaxed.

"Anyway, do you know the way to the Capital? Or how long it will take to get there? We need to plan our travel time accordingly."

"Actually, we don't really need to go all the way to the capital. That would take almost a month, or even more! We just need to travel to the Power city, which is just a few days away. From there we can have the letter sent to the Temple in the capital directly."

"And do you know the way to Power city?"

"Naturally, I know everything!" she said, with pride painted on her face. If she didn't have bits of fruit stuck right above her lips it might have even seemed impressive.

"Then let's stop wasting time," Lex said getting up. "The longer we delay, the greater there is a chance of something going wrong. We should hurry up."

Tiffany, the little glutton, seemed reluctant to leave the restaurant but ultimately followed Lex. Lex got on the cycle and Tiffany climbed on the small, extra seat attached behind and they finally departed. The road once outside the town was once again a dirt road, but Lex was impressed by the fact that it was leveled and uniform all the way, with no bumps or potholes. He wondered who maintained the roads, but it was just a passing thought. There were no signs anywhere but Tiffany gave him directions whenever they were needed, and truly did seem to know where they were going.

Lex maintained an even pace so that he would not get tired, but they were already much faster than when he was jogging. After a few hours they stopped encountering farms and the scenery was filled with verdant hills that were slowly becoming smaller. In the distance Lex could see a forest that seemed to reach out into the horizon. This place really did have a lot of vegetation, which made him more sure of his conjecture that the Beast Alpha of this country was not actually a Beast but a Spirit Plant. He wondered if he could get a seed or a cutting...

Suddenly Lex felt goosebumps all over his body and his body stiffened, as if sensing danger. He looked around to locate the source of his unease, but did not need to look for long. Some distance behind them Lex saw a lone, brown colored wolf standing in the middle of the road staring at them. The distance

made it hard to tell but Lex felt like the wolf was at least five feet in height, which would make it the largest canine he had ever seen.

Tiffany noticed him staring at the wolf and tried to reassure him, "don't worry. As long as we're on the road no beast will attack humans, not to mention I have the token of the Temple. It will be able to sense the aura of the Lord Protector on it and..." before Tiffany could finish the wolf looked up into the sky and let out a loud, savage howl. A tide of wolves emerged from the trees behind it and surged towards the duo.

"Hold on!" Lex roared, and started cycling at full speed. Tiffany was extremely frightened and was hugging his back tightly. Lex also felt fear, but he also felt excitement and exhilaration. Last time with the zombies he was caught unprepared, but this time he was ready for trouble.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 59: Zombie slayer returns

Lex was cycling as fast as he could, but he knew that he would not be able to match the stamina of an entire wolf pack. Eventually they would catch up. Fitting the Fancy Monocle in his eye he turned around once more to take a look at his assailants. A single glance was all it took for the monocle to record all the data he needed. The giant wolf, which Lex assumed was the leader of the pack, was at Spiritual Awakening while the rest were normal wolves. Spiritual awakening was the level that animals entered when they became spiritual beasts, and was equivalent to a human Qi training. The fact that the rest of the pack consisted of normal wolves did not make Lex's life any easier either, as their numbers continued to increase! So far sixty wolves were already chasing after him, with the leader of the pack still standing in the back.

Various thoughts raced through Lex's mind as he decided the best course of action. The most obvious option was to take out his gun and shoot, but the recoil on that was too strong and would probably knock him off his cycle. He could use his short sword to attack them if they get close, but if they overwhelmed him with numbers he wasn't sure about being able to protect himself let alone Tiffany. A few other thoughts ran through his mind before he looked up at the sky. The sun was getting low, but it was still about an hour away from dusk.

"Tiffany, do you know any good places we can hide? Or get a vantage against the wolves?" he asked, but the young girl was frozen in fear and she was not able to answer. Lex shook his head and swiftly made a plan.

He reached a hand into his backpack and rummaged around till he found two small cylindrical items. When he pulled them out they looked like shotgun shells, but they served a different purpose. He cracked one and thick gray smoke started pouring out, completely covering the road behind them. This was a compact smokescreen-maker that he had bought. The smoke not only affected visibility, it would sting the eyes, nose and throat of anyone in the smoke. Lex was not sure how strong the effect would be on these wolves, but he was certain it would at least slow them down and affect their senses. Waiting till night was a very important part of his plan and he had to delay things as much as he could.

"Tiffany, hold this," Lex said as he handed her the smokescreen maker. He had to repeat himself a few times but the young girl eventually obeyed, and held onto it tightly. Slowly, she was coming out of her initial shock and although she was still afraid she was no longer frozen. "Tell me when the smoke stops coming out," he instructed and put his hand back into his bag. Some more rummaging and he took out what looked like an injection.

Wasting no time he stabbed himself in the arm and squeezed the injection. This was a booster that would act like adrenaline, boosting his speed and giving him energy, and it simultaneously relieved the fatigue his muscles built up. With that done he turned his attention to cycling, and sped up even further. After a few minutes the smokescreen maker stopped working, but Lex didn't immediately use the second one. He only had two and he had to use them effectively!

The wolves had slowed down and the distance between them had increased. The pursuit continued like that for another twenty minutes before the wolves seemed to have recovered from the effects of the smokescreen and sped up their chase. He waited till they came closer and used the second smokescreen as well. This was nothing more than a delaying tactic, as he would not be able to go far enough to completely escape them no matter what he did. Besides, running away was never his plan to begin with.

The second smokescreen bought him some time, as the wolves seemed to be affected even worse the second time. They were also hesitant in coming near him, and Lex was sure that if it weren't for the orders of the leader of the pack they would have stopped chasing after him. Speaking of the leader, it seemed completely unaffected by the smoke, but did not venture away from the pack to hunt Lex alone. That was quite fortunate as Lex would have to risk using his gun if the large wolf chased. The sun eventually set, and fortunately it set earlier than Lex had expected. He put on his night vision goggles and, to Tiffany's dismay, veered off the road and directly into the forest.

His cycle was already the best in the shop that he had gotten it from, but he doubted it would last long with such rough use. Cycling on no clear path, over tough tree roots and various jagged rocks he expected at least the tyres would give out soon. He reached into his bag one more time and took out a flashbang, pressed a red button and dropped it on the floor. It had a ten second delay, which should be

enough to blind the wolves immediately behind him and give him some time. Not slowing down at all he made his way through the increasingly dark forest.

"Tiffany, listen to me," he said, once again reaching into his bag. "I'm going to hide you and attract the wolves. Wait till they're out of sight and run away!"

"What? No!" the young girl exclaimed in fear and shock.

"There's no choice. We can't risk you getting caught. Listen to me, I'll be fine. But you need to run! For the Lord Protector, you have to be safe!"

Lex's words seemed to resonate with the girl, but she had gone completely pale and bit her in anxiousness and frustration. Tears welled up in her eyes but she did her best to keep them from falling.

Finally Lex pulled his hand out of his bag with his special deodorant. He sprayed Tiffany from top to bottom, making sure to eliminate any and all smell on her. "Get ready," he said when he heard the flashbang go off in the distance.

He stopped for only a moment, grabbed the girl with a single hand and lurched her high up onto a branch of a very tall tree. That should keep her out of sight, and with no smell they wolves shouldn't be able to track her. But still despite that, he didn't want to risk going too far. He cycled just a little bit further and waited till the wolves were in sight. He needed to ensure that they kept pursuing him. He only needed to wait a few more seconds till they came in view.

"Hey you filthy mutts!" he roared as he started cycling away again. "Do you think I'm easy prey? Keep chasing after me if you have the guts! We'll see who hunts who!" Lex kept yelling as he cycled away. Coming closer to the inevitable confrontation Lex was filled with nervousness, but also excitement. Lex the zombie slayer was about to try his hand on slaying some wolves!

\*\*\*\*\*

Tiffany was hugging the trunk of the tree, having covered her body in some leaves she had broken off the branches. In the dark it was already hard to see, but there was no harm in trying to camouflage herself some more. When the first wolf crossed from near the tree she almost let out a startled cry, but

she was able to control herself. After that the wolves kept passing her by, and as she saw their vast numbers fear gripped her. She knew Lex said that he would be fine, but she was not an idiot. She did not believe he could survive all these wolves attacking him. She closed her eyes and tried to distract her thoughts. For the Lord Protector, she had to survive! She couldn't let Lex's sacrifice be in vain.

After a few minutes peace returned to the forest around her. No more wolves had run past her tree for a while now, and she could no longer even hear Lex's yelling and taunting. As much as she wanted to stay in the tree and continue hiding, she knew she had to move. She stopped hugging the tree and dropped all the leaves attached to her body, ready to climb down, but when she turned her body froze. Right in front of her, a giant sparrow sat in the tree, staring directly at her. Tiffany gulped as she tried to stop her body from trembling.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 60: Wanna-be-tarzan

As Lex made his way through the forest, he could feel the condition of his cycle deteriorating. The tyres' frame was losing shape and was becoming bumpy. After a few more minutes he eventually gave up on the cycle and started running. Now he was really in the thick of things. He was not afraid of fighting a few wolves, but there really were too many after him for him to make a stand. He had to fight them off while he kept running. He held his short sword in his right hand and the Heavy Harley in his left hand.

When he was cycling on the road he had managed to pull quite a distance, but in the forest and on foot it wouldn't be long now till they caught up to him. His aim wasn't that good yet, not to mention with his left hand, but since he would be fighting in close range he would manage.

As Lex jumped over a fallen tree he entered a clearing. Just as he was planning how to engage he felt goosebumps on his back and leaped to his side without any delay. A wolf had pounced on him, but barely missed him. He aimed the Harley at the wolf and without hesitation shot at its body. The wolf was hit, but was only wounded. Lex got up, ready to stab the downed wolf but three more wolves jumped at him from the trees. He dodged to the side but swung his short sword at the nearest wolf while shooting at the one immediately behind it. The sword slashed at the wolf's face but because he had swung without any form or force it only cut the wolf and didn't kill it, while his shot missed entirely but at least deterred the chasing wolf. The wolves stopped attacking, and started arranging themselves in a formation to surround him but Lex had no intention of waiting. Lex lunged towards the wolf he had shot earlier and stabbed his short sword towards its face. The wolf tried to dodge but its injury prevented it from moving quickly and Lex's sword found its way into its neck. The first wolf collapsed but before he could do anything else the other three wolves attacked from behind. Lex, who had spent some time preparing for fights using some of the most knowledge rich video games ever, knew exactly what to do - The Dark Souls Roll!

Coming out of the roll Lex quickly took aim behind him and shot a few rounds at the wolves before they could reach him. He was embarrassed to discover that even at such a close range he missed some of his shots - the recoil was nothing to scoff at. Fortunately he hit enough shots, and he wounded the wolves enough that he was easily able to stab them to death.

The small engagement left Lex out of breath, but in actuality it had not even been an entire minute long.

"You should have given up on the quest," said Mary who had appeared in the air in front of him. She wore a worried look as she looked deep into the forest. "There's no way you can handle so many wolves."

"As long as I keep moving and pick them off a few at a time, I'll be fine." Lex didn't wait for the rest of the wolves, he turned and started running deeper into the forest. Truth be told, logically it seemed impossible for Lex to survive this but he had a gut feeling that he could. It was as if his instincts were driving his actions, leading him onto the path that would help him survive.

"Mary, if I make any mistakes then let me know. The gun has 93 bullets left, when they run out remind me to refill the magazine. I have a few spirit tokens in my bag. If you see any wolves sneaking up from behind when I'm in a fight, warn me."

"You should also keep an eye out for other Beasts," Mary warned, sitting on his head as he ran. "Such a commotion is bound to attract attention."

Lex took her advice in his stride as he ran. His biggest concern was the darkness. He could only see because of his night vision glasses but he had confirmed using the fancy monocle that the wolves could see just fine, or at least better than he naturally could in the dark. He could not afford to damage his glasses.

He heard the sounds of his pursuers and he glanced back to see two more wolves closing in on him. He turned towards the wolves and put his back against a tree so nothing would sneak up on him from behind. He aimed the Heavy Harley, making sure his stance was correct, before shooting at the nearest wolf. He didn't know if he was lucky or his aim was good when he actually took his time, but he shot the wolf in the head, instantly killing it. Aware that he didn't have the time to aim properly again, he launched himself towards the second wolf and stabbed at it, making sure to not get hit in return. He managed to stab it above its right leg, crippling its movement.

'I do more damage with stabs than slashes,' he had a passing thought. But he had no time to waste on contemplation. With the wolf injured and unable to give chase, Lex left, not bothering to finish the kill. Every second was important to him right now, he had to make the correct decision at every turn. He had to stay ahead of the pack.

The young man ran aimlessly through the woods, completely lost, but behind him he left a trail of dead or wounded wolves. With each encounter he became more familiar with how the wolves attacked, with each encounter he learned the limits of his ability, with each encounter he became more deadly. Given his untrained and amateur state, were anyone to see him they would be taken aback by the fact that he had yet to be hit even a single time by the wolves so far!

His aim with the gun improved, and after a while he began adjusting for the recoil instinctively. Eventually he reached the point where he became better with the gun in his left hand than he was in the right. Like on Vegus Minima, his actions became seamless and his body knew exactly how to move. At a certain point he ran into wolves, but this time they were coming at him from the front as well as from behind him. They must have surrounded him, but he was completely unaware. Without a moment's hesitation, as if that had been his plan all along, he holstered his weapons and climbed up a tree with the speed and efficiency of a monkey. But that was not an escape, the wolves would find a way to reach him, so he leaped from the branch of one tree to the next. But how could running in a forest be so easy? He leaped onto the latest tree branch, ready to keep moving, but instead of the firm bark of a tree his foot landed on something squishy, causing him to lose his footing and fall out of the tree.

Panicking a little, he raced to get up, the wolves were right behind him, but his thoughts were interrupted by a loud and angry screech! He looked up to see a barrel of angry monkeys, jumping up and down ready to attack.

Before a complete idea could even form in his mind, Lex was racing away from the tree and towards the wolves. He shot the Harley a few times at the wolves, injuring them and causing them to stumble, before he ran right through the small pack. From the howling and screeching behind him Lex was sure the two groups of animals had started fighting. He smirked, and looked back once to ensure that they were indeed fighting and not chasing him together, before continuing his escape.

It was at this moment, when a small amount of pride and confidence were beginning to fill Lex's heart, when he saw the largest wolf - the Alpha - standing right in his path with a dozen or so wolves behind it.

"Bloody hell!" he exclaimed as he started shooting the Harley as quickly as he could manage!