

## **Innkeeper 521**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 521: Immortal Bastion

Creating a third settlement was an exciting task for Lex, but first he had to decide where to build it. The Midnight Manor was right in the center of the Inn, Main street was right below it to the south, and the village, where most of the entertainment was based, was to the west. To the north was the greenhouse, which was ever expanding, so Lex wanted to avoid building in that direction. That left only the east without anything major, so that is where he decided to build.

The design of the third settlement was very different from anything Lex had built before, for he did not want to pack all the guests densely in a concentrated area. Instead, it would be a vast, sprawling development spread over a large area. Instead of tall buildings and structures, there would be a multitude of buildings one or two stories high dotting the entire region.

As was customary every time he added something prominent to the Inn, he expanded the size of the Inn. It was not too much, just about 20,000 acres of land added in the east for a total of two hundred million MP.

It was not an exaggeration to say 20,000 acres was not a lot of land. A single state in the US took up millions of acres of so the Inn which was still only in the hundreds of thousands was miniscule.

Adding a new location also meant making alterations to the various transport systems available at the Inn to include it. Train tracks were laid down, roads were cut through grass, the path of the lazy river was altered and Lex finally also added an airport.

As amazing as it would be to have helicopters fly guests around the Inn, they were much too noisy and inefficient. With Xeon as a member of the Inn now, Lex had him purchase a few hundred ships via the Guild room and optimize them for the Inn's use.

Massive jets capable of vertical takeoffs while staying completely silent filled the garages in the airports. Each jet was capable of carrying anywhere between 100 to 300 guests at a time, and could traverse the entire length of the Inn in merely a couple of minutes - only because they kept their acceleration within comfort levels even for mortals.

Naturally, a couple of other airports were also included at the other areas of the Inn.

With transportation taken care of, it was time to look at the layout of the new settlement. But first, Lex wanted to give it a name. Continuously calling it a settlement or development was tedious.

Lex's naming sense wasn't the best, but since he had decided to do things properly, he didn't let them make him do things half-heartedly. Each area of the Inn had been designed with a purpose in mind. Main street was where the guests who only wanted a quiet or peaceful vacation went, and the esthetic and feel of the area matched it. The village, instead, was a happening place with stadiums, parks, coliseums, concert halls and anything else that spoke of entertainment and thus was designed with that in mind.

This new area was supposed to be a gathering place for the more adventurous guests, with the intentions of visiting the Minor realms, or perhaps as a resting area before heading off to dangerous places outside of the Inn. Other than eventually gathering all the entrances to the Minor halls here, Lex wanted to fill this place with Training halls, the eventual armory he would open, pharmacies, equipment shops and anything else that would aid a guest about to venture off on a perilous journey. In the same breath, he had to remember that such guests were not usually fond of overly complicated or embellished names. Something simple and direct would suffice.

After crossing off dozens of ideas, and thoroughly going through dictionaries and thesauruses, Lex settled on the name Immortal Bastion. It would be a place where warriors could come for their final rest before war, a safe haven where they could prepare themselves in every sense before venturing into the unknown.

With the name decided, Lex got to work. Since this latest addition was planned to be over a large area rather than concentrated around one spot, there could be no 'city center' or main area where a few important services were centered. While this could obviously not be implemented for everything, most services had to be readily available throughout the development.

Lex began by setting down 100 'small villages' spread out over a large area, and around them began putting down small and large houses as well as courtyards. Training rooms, Meditation rooms and Guild room branches were added every mile. He also added a prominent chapel-like building repeatedly where he would eventually add entrances to the Minor realms.

If someone wanted to visit a specific Minor realm, they would have to go to a specific chapel, but if they wanted to enter one randomly, they only needed to go to the nearest one. Speaking of looking for

specific Minor realms, Lex had assigned workers to compile all the data available for each Minor realm that his guests exited from. They would eventually be named and labeled, so that it was easier to identify them.

Lex began working on the minor details of the Bastion, adding various monuments, fountains, parks and such to bring life to the area. But even before he had finished, the Bastion began attracting attention.

Exploring the Inn had become like a game to many, especially after the latest Midnight letterhead told a story of a guest who discovered a hidden chest containing a ticket to a 1 month free stay at the Inn. During the hunt for Minor realms, many of the small, hidden rewards Lex had hid around the Inn had finally been discovered.

Just as Lex had expected, that had increased the guests interest in exploring the more remote areas of the Inn, slowly uncovering the various scenic spots hidden around.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 522: Grand Prix

Although at the moment the Immortal Bastion was nothing more than an empty shell, with time Lex would turn it into a huge gathering spot for all kinds of adventurers. Until then, it would have to stay just as a large gathering spot for various kinds of residencies.

After a couple of weeks, once more entrances to Minor realms were discovered, he would shift a few undiscovered ones and move them here.

But all of that was for later. The reason he was in a rush to complete the Bastion now was because the Grand Prix was about to begin. Last-minute changes to the course would have to be made to include the Bastion, and Lex kept himself separated from it so that he would not have any unfair advantages during the race. After all, he had thoroughly enjoyed the previous race and wanted to compete fairly. Moreover, the list of other racers was quite interesting as well.

Lex teleported to his room to take a short nap before the race began. He did not feel tired, mentally or physically, but he had been awake for multiple days in a row once again and although physically he did not need it, it was tough to break the psychological habit of needing to sleep.

Fortunately, although his breakthrough made it so that he did not need sleep, it did not interfere with his ability to fall asleep at all. When he woke up from his dreamless sleep, Lex felt a tinge of dissatisfaction. He did not feel refreshed at all, because he was not tired to begin with!

Never in his life did Lex think that he would complain of feeling too energetic and fresh, but it was taking away from one of his favorite activities!

Shaking his head, Lex put the matter behind him. He dressed up casually, put on his Clark Kent glasses and teleported to the Inn.

A massive crowd had gathered at the village for that was both the starting and ending line for the race. Stadiums were filled to the brim with families and cheering fans, all supporting their favorite racers.

Although Leo himself had only done a single race, mostly to get eligibility, most others had done quite a few races. Their intentions were to get used to the dynamics of the race and develop personal strategies, but they were in for a surprise.

The format for the final race had been changed! Instead of 3 laps of the track, there would only be one lap. The first to cross the finish line would be the winner. But, in exchange for this rule change, the track had been made much larger. Not only did it go across every major attraction at the Inn, the traps and tricks were kicked up a notch.

Regardless of the changes, due to the fact that Leo had only participated in one race, his following was not as large as others, though his unique style of winning his only race had still won him some fans. Moreover, stories of how he defeated countless Nascent cultivators had also raised his popularity a bit. But it was only a bit.

Compared to others, such as Brandon Morrison, Alexander's grandfather, Pvarti, Greta Noel the famous strip poker player, the extremely handsome Gerard, the big brother of the Inn Z, and a few others, he was not that outstanding. Moreover, Lex was certain that the participants had been extremely limited because most of those whose cultivation level was very high were still cultivating. Despite that, there were well over 100 contestants in the Grand Prix.

But Lex didn't mind his lack of popularity - that wasn't why he had been participating in the first place. Wearing a carefree smile, Lex got into his highly modified golf cart and made himself comfortable.

Unlike the previous race, where he had been near the front, this time Lex was in the absolute last row of racers. It did not matter. The race was long enough to make up for any tiny disadvantage the starting position would give.

"Ladies and gents," a charismatic voice boomed over the crowds, "devils and dames, beasts and spirits, I'm your favorite commentator, Awry, here with you on the first ever Golf Cart Grand Prix!"

The crowd burst into an excited cheer jumping up and down at their seats. It wasn't just the stadium that had such a reaction. Due to the convenience provided by the Inn of being able to watch all events from personal screens anywhere inside the Inn, from the peak of the Midnight mountain to the floating rubber donuts in the lazy river, guests were watching the race.

Although most kids lacked the attention span for such a thing, some of the older ones inside the spaceship made themselves comfortable in their bean bags, ready with their chips and nuggets to snack as they watched.

"Alright contestants, get inside your vehicles as I walk you through the upcoming event. The screens that everyone other than the contestants could see started to show the track as the racers would experience them while the commentator continued to talk.

"Unlike previous races, this one will only have a single lap, so there's no time to familiarize yourself with the track, and you'll have to deal with the surprises as they come! The power ups are all the same that you've already experienced, but the obstacles you will face are all new!"

The crowds cheered once again while the racers psyched themselves up using their various ways. The betting, which had been open for quite a while now, was about to close. Lex himself did not bother to bet, for whether he won or lost, he would be the one making the payment. The rest of the racers, though, all bet on themselves as a show of confidence.

The favorite to win the race was Gerard and Lex couldn't blame anyone for thinking as such. He'd had the perfect record so far in any race he participated in, but that was only so far.

Lex tightened his grip on the steering wheel as the commentator finally finished explaining the race to everyone.

Finally, in front of all the racers, Little Blue appeared in the sky, surrounded by red water. A moment later the water turned yellow, alongside a loud siren, and a moment later, turned green.

The race had begun.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 523: Interesting

Unlike the previous race where Lex had a very aggressive start, he decided to drive a little more tamely this time. The primary reason for that was the fact that every other racer around him was driving like a maniac!

He had not progressed ten feet (3 meters) forward when the first cart crashed into him! Lex had immediately deployed defensive techniques to keep his cart safe, but the thing was so had everyone else! Like hooligans everyone drove left and right, pushing everyone beside them off the track or trying to damage their vehicle!

Since the only techniques one could use were defensive, the only way to attack other contestants was to use the power ups, or to crash the cart itself into them. When it came to the matter of a physical contest, everyone was fairly confident in their own defensive techniques, so if such rough driving continued, the first to be disqualified would be those whose techniques failed first.

Lex did not think for even a moment that someone could breach his defense using only golf carts, but at the same time he was not planning on relying on such mundane tactics for knockouts. The severe lack of speed and close distance between all the racers made it hard for Lex to avoid getting crashed into, so he didn't even try.

Instead, he entered into the state of 'flow' and honed onto what his intuition told him. Instead of trying to avoid crashes, Lex began to maneuver his cart so that instead of pushed aside, he would be pushed forward!

His perception of time seemed to slow down as Lex applied the limited knowledge he had gained of drifting to angle his cart just right beforehand so that when the inevitable crash came, he would move along his desired path.

Since the beginning of the race had been so chaotic and exciting, the crowds were going wild while Awry could only comment on some of the crowd favorites. Gerard was in the lead, his ingenious use of his bloodline allowing him to escape the chaos before anyone else. Even the nearest racer was far behind the racing savant, not to mention still embroiled in the mess.

But, suddenly, from the corner of his eye, Awry saw something very unusual. Between all the madness that seemed to be sucking everyone in, one cart seemed to be moving with the chaos, as if it were a ship sailing over stormy waters!

"Wait a minute folks, turn your attention to cart number 69!" Awry spoke with the excitement of a child.

The driver seems to be using the other carts to his advantage. The random madness, when seen from the perspective of the cart, seemed a carefully orchestrated plan designed to gain every possible inch over the competition!

"The other carts are not obstacles in its path but the wind beneath its proverbial wings! It's gliding through! He just passed number 50, oh no wait, yes, he gracefully took the attack from fan favorite Brandon and bounced off of the underdog, vice-captain Booty, and he managed to push himself out of the crowd!"

By the time it took the crown to find the cart the commentator was talking about, Lex had already pushed away from the remaining carts! But the race had only begun, and he was not the first to escape either.

He floored the accelerator as he spread his spirit sense up ahead to check the track for traps! The track started at the stadium but did not leave the village immediately. Instead, it seemed to be diverted towards the heart of the village, where the giant orb of water floated in the sky!

After a sharp turn through which Lex was able to drift beautifully, Lex finally saw the first contestant ahead of him. He did not recognize the man dressed in a giant black hood, but that didn't-

A section of the road underneath the racer in front of Lex sprung up from the ground, a massive spring connected underneath keeping the road bouncing up and down. The contestant had been launched vertically into the air, but his forward momentum kept him moving.

For a moment Lex thought he had fallen for a trap, but then Lex saw the racer land effortlessly in a different section of the track, bypassing the ordinary path completely!

"Cart number 13 takes the lead!" Awry suddenly roared as an image of him jumping up and down from excitement was shown in a corner of everyone's screens. "Gerard, in cart number 01 has fallen behind. What an ingenious move by the contestant called Xenmas, although it remains to be seen if it was skill or dumb luck!"

Lex himself was unsure of how the other had done so, but he did not try to emulate him. Even with his intuition, it was impossible to predict what kind of trap would be triggered, so every time he sensed danger, he made sure to avoid it! And there were many such instances!

Disguised almost perfectly, Lex actually ended up overlooking several traps with his spirit sense, and would have been a victim to them were it not for his intuition. But since his methods were working Lex would not waste time dwelling on it, for the first real challenge finally appeared.

In front of him, Lex saw a shining golden box in the middle of the road. That would be a power up, something he should have been excited for. But directly behind the power up... the road began inclining upwards. Slowly at first, but eventually the incline changed from being gentle to directly being vertical, aiming towards the floating orb of water in the sky!

This... this was not in any of the plans for the race Lex had seen! Although Lex had told Mary to overlook the design of the race, and that he would directly approve it through the system without looking at the plans... this was pushing it, no?

But before his brain could fry, he noticed other drivers going up the vertical road. It seemed their carts were not falling off, and had been kept attached to the road somehow.

"Interesting," he said, driving straight into the power up.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 524: Just getting started

The moment Lex drove through the power up, a button on his golf that was previously gray turned blue. Lex clicked his tongue in annoyance, but didn't focus on it for too long. He, like every other participant in the race, had memorized all the available power ups and how to identify them. There were three buttons on the golf cart, each of which would turn a certain color based on the power up he received.

Once he used up a power up, the button would once again turn gray, meaning he could hoard up to 3 power ups at a time at most. The blue power up wasn't actually bad, but it was designed for someone who was trailing in the race. It would give the racer a temporary speed boost, its speed and duration based on how far behind he was.

Although Lex could not tell for certain, since the entire track was not visible to him, he was fairly certain he was in the top 10, so the boost would be short and tame. But beggars couldn't be choosers.

Lex's cart started going up the incline, the acceleration clearly dropped as the engine used more power to keep it climbing. Lex felt nervous about the climb, but there was no other track for him to follow. The gradient of the climb kept increasing, and kept slowing Lex down, right up until it reached about 50 degrees.

Lex felt a subtle shift in the way the cart was moving, and guessed that a hidden formation had been activated because gravity no longer seemed to be pulling him down towards the ground, and instead the direction of gravity was the road itself!

As if that wasn't enough, the speed of his cart skyrocketed and within moments, he found himself driving vertically up and reaching the floating orb. The speed boost explained why everyone else was so far ahead of him that he could barely see anyone. The only reason Lex could even see Xenmas was because he had skipped the track for the orb entirely!

The track went through a small tunnel right in the orb, and Lex once again entered his state of flow! His accelerated speed greatly tested his reaction time, and the tunnel going through the water was swerving left and right, making it hard for Lex to anticipate the upcoming path!

But due to his ever-increasing experience with drifting, his intuition and his state of flow, Lex did not slow down at all as he navigated the water tunnel!

Due to the fact that Lex never slowed down, he quickly caught up to the driver right ahead of him, but he immediately noticed something off! Even if the driver had slowed down for the turns, as someone who had gone through the preliminary round, he shouldn't have needed to slow down this much to navigate the tunnel.

His intuition suddenly blared a warning for upcoming danger, and Lex did not hesitate to swerve his steering wheel as hard as he could, pull the handbrake and hit the power up button at the same time!

"DRIFT KING LEO IS AT IT AGAIN!" roared the commentator as his body trembled from the adrenaline rush.

The camera quickly cut to Lex, showing what happened in slow motion. One moment he was going straight, and the next moment he started moving diagonally, while actually increasing his speed somehow! The next moment, the screen showed Leo's cart dodging a spear that had been launched from the water right underneath the track!

The spear was hard to see due to it being underneath the track that was now made of water, and its timing had been perfect. Yet the smooth evasive maneuver pulled off by Leo and his calm expression told that everything was within his control.

Countless guests were beginning to switch their loyalty towards Leo, clearly impressed by his skill, when he discovered a secret none of the drivers before him had considered! The shift in gravity had not resulted from the track, but from within the cart itself! Leo had drifted right to the top of the tunnel, passing the contestant ahead of him while driving literally right above him!

Leo ended the drift and continued to the race, his cart not slowing down for even a moment the entire time! With that single move, Leo had determined himself as one of the favorites for the race, but it was unknown if his stellar performance would continue. After all, the race had just begun, and many were already catching up behind him!

Lex himself was not nearly as calm as he appeared. He had just become too used to masking his emotions and keeping a calm demeanor. But internally, he was feeling exhilarated!

The fact that he had dodged that single spear seemed to have incensed the track, if that was possible, and countless other traps kept appearing in his way. But he kept avoiding them effortlessly, and he was having the time of his life doing it!

He recalled long ago, when he had wished for more excitement in his life. For a time after that, he regretted making such a wish, mostly because he was always being hunted by zombies or wolves or miscellaneous bad guys, but right now he was having the time of his life!

There was something about going fast, the wind in his hair, dodging all obstacles, continuing on his path unimpeded-

His inner monologue ended quite abruptly when his cart suddenly slipped! Right in front of him there was a cart pile-up and due to his increased speed and loss of control, there didn't seem to be a way to avoid crashing!

He immediately entered the 'overdrive' state and realized what had happened. On earth, thin, nearly invisible layers of ice that formed on roads were called black ice, mostly due to the color of the road beneath them. Regardless of what it was called, the point was that it was an imperceptible layer of ice that covered the track, or in this case, was what the track had turned into!

For the first time in the race, Lex hit the brakes without the intention of drifting! But he was not aiming to slow down, either. Suddenly hitting the brakes caused the cart to skid even more, turning sideways as it continued to hurl towards the pile up. But just as it approached, Lex shifted his left leg out the open side of the cart and stomped the track using his immense physical strength!

Unanimously, the crowd's jaws dropped as they saw Leo jump the cart sideways, using the very limited free space between the pileup and the tunnel roof - or base depending on how you looked at it - and pass through without touching a single other vehicle!

Once the cart landed on the other side, it did a single, 360 degree swerve while Lex regained control and just kept on driving.

He exited the overdrive state as soon as he crossed the hurdle, his heart beating like a drum during a rock concert! He had never been in any physical danger, but the thought of finally stumbling across an obstacle seemed more daunting than any real danger at that point.

Once across, though, he felt like laughing! He was Lex, the freaking Innkeeper- no, uh, he was Leo, the owner of Gamer's Den. Simple obstacles such as these couldn't phase him!

In the distance, Lex saw a bright light, indicating the end of the water tunnel, finally. He had already seen bits of the track that came next and knew that vines were going to be the next big obstacle, but he wasn't worried. With his intuition he was-

'FUDGE!' he roared in his mind the moment he exited the tunnel, because there was no track! He had been launched straight into the clouds with no track beneath him and no indication of where he was supposed to land!

He spread his spirit sense as far and wide as he could to search for where he was supposed to go next, but it was useless. Slowly and predictably, he reached the arch of his launch. For a single, uncertain moment, he hovered in the air, before he began plummeting through the sky!

Unsure of what to expect, since he was still within the clouds, his view completely blocked, Lex began using his defensive techniques to ensure the cart would survive the crash when, abruptly and unexpectedly, he sensed a track!

He slammed the accelerator even before he landed. His defensive technique had been employed just in time as his cart bounced on the ground once before firmly planting itself on the ground and continuing forward.

He burst through the clouds to realize where he was! He was in the floating city above the village, on a track that was completely separate from the one he had seen on the ground! How would this work?

He didn't have time to ponder as his intuition kicked in, warning of an attack coming from behind him. Lex recognized the sound of incoming artillery, and knew that someone behind him had used a power up targeting him!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 525: 100,000 bated breaths!

Lex recognized the distinct sound of cloth flapping in the wind and knew exactly what power up was coming for him. It was troubling because this particular power up had a homing function, so it wasn't easy to avoid.

This was not a matter of defense, and he dared say that even if he used Talk to the Hand and put up a barrier, it would not be enough to escape from the effects of this particular power up. If he still had the speed boost power up, he could have used it at the right moment to escape, but since he did not he would have to get creative.

Without even needing to think about it, he entered the state of flow and drove his cart to the edge of the track. Relying on his keen intuition, his incredible sense of hearing and his spirit sense that he had surrounded his cart with, he waited for the power-up to come just close enough.

One second, two... Before the third second could arrive, Lex struck his hand out of the cart and grabbed onto a street light just off the track. Latching onto the cart as tightly as he could, he used his grip on the street light as a pivot and had the cart spin a full circle around the pole, abruptly moving out of its original trajectory.

Just as he was about to get back onto the track, he saw a massive white blanket throw itself where his cart should have been! This was a power-up called the Mummy wrap, and basically consisted of a white, indestructible blanket that would completely wrap itself around the moving golf carts, obstructing not only the view but also the spirit senses! It lasted an enormous 10 seconds, which was long enough for a speed cart to crash somewhere or go off course directly! More importantly, it provided the driver right behind to overtake the competition.

From the corner of his eye, Lex noticed a driver catching up to him. He immediately recognized the infamous Noel sister, Greta! Although she was too far for Lex to hear what she was screaming, his phenomenal eyesight allowed him to read her lips and pick up on some of the curse words she was using. It seemed she was upset over Lex dodging her power up.

The crowds watching, however, were all ecstatic and could not get enough of Leo's driving. To be honest, Leo was nowhere near the level of Gerard, who had yet to enter a single precarious situation at all. But it was the constant close calls that got the viewers adrenaline pumping, and his ever stoic expression that elevated his image.

But Lex could not be bothered by any of that now. An intersection in the track was coming up! On the left, Lex could clearly see a power-up floating within reach, but the right path was descending - a way back to the track below!

Lex had neither the time to debate his options nor the will to gamble. In such a moment, he relied completely on his intuition, and turned towards the left path. The button for the power-ups turned red, making Lex grin.

The Kamikaze bomber was perceived as one of the more useless power ups, considering it caused a powerful explosion right on the users cart. But for Lex and his incredible defense that was not a problem at all. Moreover, it provided him with an excellent way to remove competitors as long as he got close enough! It could also help him avoid certain other power ups targeting him as well. A very versatile tool.

But though he got the power up, he had to pay the corresponding price! The track led him right off the edge of the floating city, driving on a path made of clouds. But his intuition was blaring, letting him know that not all clouds were solid and he could easily plummet to the ground.

He was not afraid of falling from heights, but rather losing his position in the race. He could no longer tell what position he was at, but he was sure it was probably near the front.

With no safety guard rails to keep him on track, and his intuition only warning him where there was danger, Lex's driving seemed to become haphazard. Many viewers became confused for a moment, before their screens suddenly highlighted the actual track in green, and all the clouds that would allow Lex to fall as red.

Sucking in a quick, cold breath, they finally realized just how precarious Lex's situation was. To be fair, anyone with a keen observation would also be able to detect the correct path due to how the clouds behaved differently, where they were solid and where they weren't, but no one had the time for that!

A few, tense minutes later, Lex finally got off the clouds. But that did not mean his track had become any easier to navigate. He had gotten off at the tip of Midnight Mountain and now had to drive down a snowy track spiraling across the mountainside.

Just as he was trying to get an understanding of how the cart drove on a snowy track, a cart literally fell out of the sky in front of him! The cart, which was covered in a golden bubble, did not slow down even for a second and continued to hurtle directly down the Mountain side with no regard for the track!

"Brandon, you juvenile geezer!" roared someone from another cart, which also crashed down from the sky. But this one did not have the smooth landing of the previous one, and became completely buried in the heavy snow!

Lex didn't pay them much mind and continued to navigate the track, but more and more carts started falling from the sky! Instead of competitors, they became more like obstacles for Lex to avoid.

But other than falling from the heavens, the carts also had another thing in common: they were all cursing Brandon!

Lex didn't know if he should be curious as to what the old man had done, or impressed by the sheer damage he had caused. But Lex put him out of his thoughts real quick as his keen senses picked up another power-up hidden underneath a pile of snow. Taking a small risk of slowing down, Lex drove headfirst into the pile to gain his second stacked power-up.

The second button turned green. This made Lex grin. This power up had been suggested by one of his workers who had been watching popsicle the sailor man and his penchant for gaining great strength when eating spinach. This power-up would not really increase the speed of his cart, but if he rammed into anyone and hit the button, their cart would literally be thrown away as if hit by a powerful ram!

Of course, there were ways of negating this ability just like any other, but it was easier said than done.

Lex continued down the mountain, still managing to avoid all obstacles, but soon a general cacophony began to trail him as all the drivers who fell out of the sky reentered the race. That in itself wasn't an issue since Lex's driving, which allowed him to avoid slowing down at all, would continue to increase the distance between them. It was the threat of being targeted by power-ups that put pressure on Lex.

Not to mention, he really didn't like this pattern of people overtaking him by breaking through or going off course. Since going off the course, to a small degree, was technically allowed, many restrictions had been put in place to discourage anyone from attempting such things or make it hard for them to gain any leads using these methods. But two people had already managed to do it.

It seemed like they really had profited from going through multiple races. Lex had to admit that he had overestimated himself and underestimated others. But, if others could do it, so could he!

Lex entered his overdrive state and began analyzing the track ahead of him, or as much of it as he could see. He had already determined where the track would proceed once he exited the mountain, so...

A few, patient minutes went by as Lex searched for the perfect spot, but the moment he found it he did not hesitate. Without any forewarning whatsoever, Lex veered to the right and, driving over a tree that had been growing at an angle, Lex launched himself off the mountain.

As the sunlight shone down on the cart flying through the air like a pegasus, lighting up the faint, confident smile worn by Leo, a hush fell over a certain part of the stadium full of guests who had been watching him. A hundred thousand guests held their breath as they watched him fly.

In a particular corner, a devil wearing a brown trench coat pulled out a small booklet from his pocket, and with a tiny yellow pencil, wrote down 'Leo'. A few familiar names above him were Gerard, Marlo and Luthor. Z's name was also mentioned, but it had a question mark right in front of it.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 526: Gelid Anima

For a few brief seconds, Lex was flying through the sky. He was cutting through the track faster than he should have been allowed, and it was only now that he was breaking the rules that he was able to see that... dozens of racers had already surpassed him somehow.

But he wasn't stressed or alarmed at the thought of being overtaken. The race was too much fun, and encountering others who were able to surpass his expectations just lit his competitive spirit on fire.

At that moment, something unusual happened. Lex entered a state completely unlike any he had experienced. The first abnormal state he had ever encountered was the flow state. The reason he called it the flow state was because it allowed him to perform every single action with absolute perfection and efficiency, something that was impossible for him to do under normal circumstances.

Even with his increased brain power and control due to his raised cultivation, he could not match the precision the flow state afforded him. His actions seemed to flow from one to the next without a break or pause, or the need to think and analyze. It was like achieving the hypothetical peak performance he was capable of unleashing.

The first time he had used it was long before he had any combat skill or sense of his own, yet he was surrounded by a horde of zombies, impossible for him to overcome. But in that moment that should have led to his death, he did not freeze nor he did not cower. Instead overcame the limits of his own experiences and killed his way out.

The next unusual state he had encountered was the overdrive state. That, once again, had come to Lex when he was faced with death. Regardless of how incompetent he himself was, the host of the Murder system had been extremely dangerous. Although Lex was the ultimate victor, had his performance lacked even a bit, he would have been a victim to that man's immense luck.

The overdrive state allowed him to push his mind and body beyond its normal limits, achieving what he normally would not have at the expense of great exhaustion. In fact, Lex had long suspected that the toll of the overdrive state would have absolutely wrecked his body had he lacked the foundation of the Regal Embrace.

While both those states were incredibly useful, and Lex had used them often, a trait they both had in common was that they would completely subdue his emotions. While Lex did not become completely emotionless, he was largely ruled by logic and the urgency of the tasks on hand. The results had not been contrary to what Lex wanted, but it seemed more like achieving the result on autopilot than doing because it satisfied his emotions.

In practice, that made no real difference and Lex never really even considered it a drawback worth mentioning, considering both the states allowed him to go above and beyond what he normally could not. But this new state... it was the opposite.

Perhaps one of the reasons Lex never encountered it before was because he was unable to physically support it. His stamina started draining rapidly as he felt each and every muscle in his body tense up and relax, readily filling him with a strength that would have otherwise required immense concentration and focus. His already fast reaction speed was kicked up a notch. His already racing thoughts were boosted beyond anything he could achieve on his own, making him feel like the world was moving in slow motion.

Moreover, instead of his emotions being suppressed and his mind making the most efficient decisions, his emotions were excited beyond measure and he was left with the ultimate freedom to do as he desired.

While the previous two states were focused mostly on his mind and making his actions efficient, this one boosted his physical skills to the max and drove his emotions into a frenzy.

It was like he was given a toy and allowed to do whatever he wanted. With the only small difference being that his own body and immense strength were the toys, and what he wanted to do was win.

The moment his cart landed on the ground, and Lex became slightly accustomed to this new 'berserk' state, he came to a new understanding of what was happening. He had assumed that because the race was organized by the system and the event panel, no one would be able to cheat. But he completely forgot that he himself was always looking for loopholes in everything related to the system. As such, it only made sense that such was also possible during the race.

With a mad grin that had an eerie resemblance to Marlo's signature look, Lex floored the accelerator. Suddenly, not only did he want to win the race, he wanted to do it while causing more chaos than even Brandon.

\*\*\*\*\*

William was sitting in his room, looking over a document. Damian had sent it to the Inn, and insisted that he take a look over it. While William originally had all his attention focused on Lex, after reading this document, he was greatly interested in his sisters as well. But, most importantly, as a leader of the human race, he was most interested in their mother, Serene Williams.

"How did you do it?" he murmured as he read the document again and again. His eyes kept switching to a few key points, trying to wrap his head around it.

The most important points were:

Belle Williams - born with the heart of a Valkyrie.

Liz Williams - born with mythical 100% compatibility to Beast Master path.

Moon Williams - born with mutated soul sense that allows her to aid immortals during the mind tribulation.

Any 3 of these abilities were... were actually genuinely unheard of in the human race, yet all three had occurred in siblings. What was driving him crazy was that if the parents had not chosen to hide these astounding abilities, what was it about Lex that caused them to hide him?

But, regardless of whatever ability Lex had, he was more interested in Serene, who had somehow achieved this. Not that he was looking down on Leon, Lex's father, but his entire life was documented so there was no reason to believe he had the ability to do anything so remarkable. In fact, before meeting Serene, even Leon's skills were somewhat mediocre, at least as far as the entire Jotun empire was concerned.

After meeting her, however, his prowess with the sword seemed to have increased.

Unfortunately, he would not get the answer to his question any time soon since Leon and Serene had disappeared without a trace.

But Williams' reverie suddenly broke when he felt a chance from within his own body. The so-called bloodline of the Williams family was actually just a watered-down version of skills he had developed on his own. The bloodline was something his descendants could unlock, though he himself lacked any such bloodline. Yet at that moment, which was coincidentally the same moment Lex entered his Berserk state, William Sephore, founder of the William family and creator of the Gelid Anima bloodline, felt himself gaining a bloodline.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 527: All's fair

Alexander Morrison was sitting alone and pondering fate. He did not know if it existed, and there was no real answer even with the Jotun Empire. He had heard a few odd mentions of the term destiny, but even then he had never managed to gain any insight about its existence.

But if fate, or destiny, or whatever else existed, it was such a strange thing. It was a thing beyond his understanding - genuinely. Someone could be born with so much, only to learn that all that he has is not actually worth so much. Or, sometimes, in life nothing significant would happen for so long, and when important events started happening, they all happened at the same time.

His thoughts were in chaos, not really following any certain path. Through the Empire's guidance and the use of the Inn's excellent facilities and services, he had once again returned to the Golden core realm. He had also become much more powerful than he had ever been, which is exactly what he wanted. But for reasons he could not understand, he still felt a strange emptiness.

There was an anxiousness in his chest he could not quieten and an irritation that ate away at his mind he could not comprehend. He had experienced this feeling a couple times before, but every time he did, he would throw himself into some training or battle, but currently he could do neither.

From an early age he had been trained to overcome every obstacle and continuously surpass himself, so he wasn't really the type to ignore a little bit of anxiety. The problem was, try as he might, he just could not understand what the cause of the feeling was.

"What's her name?" asked a stranger sitting beside Alexander.

The young man was genuinely startled. So lost in his thoughts was he, that he had completely forgotten his surroundings and let down his guard, completely missing the stranger who approached him.

But looking at him, the stranger looked no older than him, and seemed just as weary as him, if not more.

"I'm sorry, what?" he asked, unsure what the question had meant.

But his question only caused the other to chuckle.

"I know that look well, friend. I know it so well. It's a girl. It's always a girl." For a moment, he fell silent again, looking down at the ground in front of him.

"Sometimes I wonder what's the point of it all? What's the point of being born into a wealthy family if it keeps you from doing what you want? What's the point of a strong cultivation if you're not strong enough to be with the one you love?"

The stranger's body trembled as he seemed to be holding himself back from doing something drastic. Eventually, though, the intensity faded and the man let out a defeated sigh.

"Please excuse me," he said, looking down at the ground, somehow feeling it an impossible task to look up at Alexander. "I was supposed to reunite with my girlfriend at the Inn. She's the most beautiful girl in the world with the most beautiful name: Ayesha. But it's been an entire year, yet she has never appeared again."

If Lex had seen this scene, he would have recognized the boy as Hairs, one of the two teenage lovers who had been guests at the Inn in its early days. Yet now he lacked the vibrancy and vigor of youth he had back then.

"I suspect... I suspect our families have done something behind our back."

Abruptly, Haris stood up.

"Sorry for rambling. I've been like that these past few days."

Without waiting for a response, he disappeared from the Inn, his eyes filled with exhaustion, but also conviction.

Alexander was left feeling bewildered about the strange encounter. But, the encounter had also prompted him to think about a name he hadn't thought of in so long: Helen. She too had disappeared so long ago, and had never returned.

Alexander did not even realize his hand had clenched into a fist.

\*\*\*\*\*

A Jotun soldier ran out of a Minor realm, a rather hidden one that no one else had discovered so far, in a panic. The moment he returned to the Inn he immediately requested his personal hologram to contact General Ragnar! Although the soldier was an insignificant nobody who should not have even had the authority to converse with the general ever, he believed he would be forgiven for the transgression when he shared the news he had discovered!

\*\*\*\*\*

The race's intensity had not decreased as time went on, but had only gotten more extreme! Lex was currently driving on a platform only 15 feet wide. It seemed plenty, honestly, if one overlooked the fact that the platform was attached to an extremely long, moving train. Moreover, Lex had closed the distance with those ahead of him, meaning he shared the platform with several other racers.

So not only did he have to manage the momentum of his own speeding cart, but anticipate centrifugal force applied every time the train itself turned around a bend while also dodging the carts racing beside him.

But, Lex being in a berserk state, wasn't really in the mood for carefully dodging all the carts and driving past them. Hitting his power-up that allowed him to ram opponents away, he directly crashed into the cart in front of him. The cart alongside its driver, a familiar demon called Pramod, were hurled directly into the air. This might have worked to his benefit, throwing them far ahead of everyone, if he hadn't been using a power-up of his own, binding his cart with that of a racer in front of him.

The two carts pulling each other in different directions were ultimately swept directly off the track and fell somewhere on the side. Laughing with triumph, Lex made his way to the front of the train where there was a boosted ramp that would launch him off the platform and back onto the real track. But how could things be so easy? Right behind him was Z, the big brother of the Inn, and direct employee of Leo.

Although Z was not vindictive by nature, something about watching his boss have the time of his life while Z himself worked endlessly brought out a side of him he had never known.

'All's fair in video games and war,' he thought to himself and activated his bloodline.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 528: Short sprint

During the golf cart racing, using any techniques to attack was not allowed. But as Lex had already clearly learned, there were clearly ways one could work around the rules.

Regalia Bloom was the bloodline that the Inn workers had, and allowed the user to manipulate energy through weapons or items. While Gerard, who had now undergone two bloodline evolutions, could use the ability a lot more freely than the rest, Z himself also had exceptional skill.

His eyes took on a silver color and his cart was covered in a similar silver hue. While he was unable to make his cart fly using his bloodline in the way Gerard did, there were other things he could do.

He smashed down an orange button, using his power up that activated boosters behind the cart, giving it a massive speed boost. The cart shot forward like a rocket and slammed directly into Lx's cart. Or, it almost did.

A massive, invisible shield had appeared right behind Lex, saving him from getting rammed. He had used Talk to the Hand, and that should have been the end of it. After all, Z had crashed into an impenetrable wall at maximum speed. His cart should have been crushed.

But not only was his cart fine, the silver hue around it started to grow brighter.

A moment later, to Lex's genuine and complete surprise, the so-called impenetrable defense that he had relied on vanished. Z's cart, which still had its boosters active, crashed into Lex's cart. But something unusual happened. Instead of being knocked out of the way, Lex's cart suddenly started losing its momentum before turning off completely!

Due to his magnified emotions, for the first time Lex ended up breaking his stoic expression, replacing it with a look of surprise. He did not understand what had happened, but he could clearly tell Z was responsible as he moved past Lex and zoomed away.

But surprised though he may be, Lex reacted quickly. He hit the button to turn his cart back on and, fortunately, nothing was broken, so it turned back on perfectly fine.

Although the functionality of the berserk state was different from the overdrive state, the function of both of them was founded on Lex's own capabilities. Even without the mental boost from his other state, Lex was able to determine quickly what had actually happened.

Z had absorbed all the energy not only from his own crash into Lex's defense, but all the spiritual energy that powered Talk to the Hand.

While theoretically possible, this was not an easy feat at all, and only became possible because many factors aligned perfectly. The first was that Talk to the Hand was not suited for use in the Golden core, so although it was seemingly stronger with him using it in the Golden Core realm, it was also more unstable, which allowed Z to easily take control of the energy that made up the technique.

The second was when their carts connected when Z rammed him. Instead of trying to knock him off the track, Z absorbed the energy that his golf cart was using to function. The lapse in energy caused the machine to stall, and then shut down.

Finally, Z channeled all that energy which, technically, he had absorbed to protect his cart from suffering from the repercussions of multiple collisions, and channeled it to the boosters that had activated from the power up. The result was silver flames that shot his cart far ahead of Lex, the source of the energy itself.

Despite being beaten badly, Lex didn't feel bad. It was actually quite amusing to encounter such unpredictable situations. But at the same time, if he wanted to win, he better stop letting others get a lead on him. If he had been in his emotionless, overdrive state Lex would have come up with some ingenious plan that maximized his efficiency and won that way. But since he was going berserk, and he also wanted to create a bigger spectacle than Brandon, he did something completely unexpected. He jumped out of the golf cart and lifted it over his head, pressing down on the accelerator with his hand so that the cart was going at full speed when he was ready to set it back down. Then, using the ridiculous boost to his physical abilities the berserk state afforded him, he started running.

Technically, this was not him using any techniques and just running. The fact that his normal running speed in a short sprint was ridiculous was inconsequential, as he was not breaking any rules.

\*\*\*\*\*

The soldier who had run out of the Minor realm came scurrying back, but this time he was followed by general Ragnar, as well as two other people he did not recognize. But since the general allowed the man and woman to follow him, they must have sufficient standing.

"This is the realm, general," he said, between breaths. Despite his cultivation in the golden core he was extremely tired, which showed just how much energy he had exerted on delivering the news as fast as possible.

"Has anyone entered the pagoda?" the general asked as he stood before the realm's entrance.

"A few, all at various levels. I suspect the restriction is on age and not cultivation level."

"And how did you recognize the heritage?" the general asked, turning his attention to the soldier. Suddenly he recalled something and asked "your name is Slag right? You were the first soldier to venture into the Midnight Inn?"

"Yes sir! The reason I recognized the heritage, sir, was that after being exposed to the Inn, I made a request to transfer to the Historical Anomalies department, sir!"

The historical anomalies department was one that studied vague, ancient histories and vague unknown powers in the universe. Practically speaking there was not much use to them, but in certain situations their expertise was useful. This happened to be such a situation.

"Why do you think it's an age restriction and not a power level restriction?" the man beside the general asked

Slag did not hesitate to answer, for it was not in his prerogative to question his superiors - even if he didn't know who they were.

"Sir, some of the soldiers who entered are in the same realm as me, but were able to enter, while I could only watch from the outside."

"Let's see if I can do anything about those restrictions," the man said, with a hint of excitement in his voice.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 529: Hallelujah

As unusual as it seemed, Lex's emotions were not so exaggerated that he would end up doing something illogical. The reason he ran with the cart lifted above him instead of driving normally was because his short burst speed was much greater than the cart itself.

Before long, he leaped up into the air and got back in the driver's seat, allowing the cart to fall back onto the platform. The cart swerved a bit and nearly fell off the moving train, but Lex managed to regain control.

He was nearing the end of the train, which was outfitted with a jump ramp. Lex didn't even want to think about what would happen if he jumped off the train to somewhere random - he was sure the track was planned better than this. But, just as he was approaching the ramp, he heard a sound in the distance that was easily recognizable, and stiffened his expression. He turned to look in the distance and saw a massive, blue-colored explosion! That was a specific power up that would only come out if someone was too far in the lead. Dammit, even if he did end up losing, he couldn't do it without at least facing off with Gerard at least once.

Lex leaped off the train, using the ramp without regard for where he would land, and it seemed his suspicions were correct. He had barely gone a few feet away from the train when he felt his cart being pulled up into the air. He looked up and saw the racing track, only it continued underneath the massive spaceship!

Whoever had updated the track really loved playing with gravity. As much as Lex wanted to continue enjoying the track and experiencing all the interesting features that had been added to it, he could do that later. He had memorized where that blue explosion had taken place and a plan to get ahead formed in his mind.

The cart turned upside down on its own, but that wasn't an issue because he would have to flip if he wanted to continue on the bottom portion of the spaceship. This portion of the track was extremely different, as there was no 'track' per se. Instead, the carts were free to drive anywhere so long as they headed in the direction of a green portal that probably teleported them elsewhere.

As if that wasn't enough, mini-turrets would come out of the ship from time to time and shoot at the drivers. Of course, evasion at such straightforward attacks was nothing to Lex.

The moment he landed on the ship he began driving, and though at first he did not attract attention since everyone assumed he was only getting adjusted to the new track, it took only a few moments for him to once again gain the attention of the audience.

While everyone was driving towards the portal, Lex was actually heading away from it! No one judged him or accused him of being stupid, as he had proven his capabilities. So, everyone only wondered what he was up to, eagerly awaiting for him to provide them with a good show.

But he kept driving in a straight line for a minute, two minutes, five minutes! At this point Lex had lost any lead he had and was trailing in the race. Everyone, even the commentator, was panicking for him. But Lex was completely calm.

He looked up - or down, depending on the point of view, and saw that he was directly opposite to the portion of the Inn where the blue explosion had happened.

He smiled, and employed one of the new defensive techniques he had picked out for himself from the vast collection he had gotten from the Infinity Emporium. It was called 'Introverts Dream' and created a bubble around Lex, isolating him from any unnatural external influences!

While this technique couldn't protect him from any direct attacks, it had many other incredible uses. Such as...

Without breaking his momentum, the wheels of the cart detached from the ship and then, with increasing speed, Lex continued to fall from the sky!

His technique had freed him from the influence of the artificial gravity that had brought him into the sky, allowing him to fall directly towards the end of the track!

For a couple of minutes, no one noticed his descent, as they had turned their attention towards other racers who were actively competing in the races. But the moment the first person noticed a cart falling out of the sky, his excited yell alerted all the others.

"It's raining men!" screamed a little girl in the stadium as she pointed towards the screen.

"Hahaha no, not men, it's-" the girl's mother tried to correct her, but when she looked at the screen she paused. Behind Lex's cart, also falling from the sky, was Z!

How could he have believed it was so easy to get rid of Leo? He had been directly hired by the Innkeeper, after all. Z did not care about winning, as long as he made Leo lose! So he had kept an eye on his boss throughout, and the moment he saw him deviating, a gut feeling made him follow along.

Of course, there were quite a few others who also followed as well. After all, if two racers were doing something unusual, there had to be a secret, right? Since they were losing anyway, there wasn't much to lose.

The result was, as the little girl so aptly put it, a rain of men alongside their carts.

On the ground, a seemingly random guest crawled out of a tent and stretched under the light of the new day. She had gone camping just to get away from the crowds as, after a bad breakup, she just wanted to be alone. The excellent atmosphere of the Inn and some time away from wretched men did her good, and she was already feeling better. A few more days of this and...

Before she could complete her thought, Lex landed in his cart right in front of her! He had naturally employed various techniques to defend his cart from the impact, so instead of crash landing, it was as if a feather were touching down on the ground.

He spared the woman no thought as he raced towards the track. If he didn't get back on in 10 seconds, he would be disqualified.

The woman, instead, was momentarily startled by the descent of the handsome stranger. Then she looked up and saw the horde about to descend on her.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 530: The Pagoda

Lex, of course, was well aware of the fact that he had been followed. There wasn't much he could do about that, as his only power up at the moment was the kamikaze explosion.

Fortunately, his little maneuver paid off, as he climbed back on the track with a few seconds to spare. Moreover, the massive scorch marks where the cart in the lead had been targeted let Lex know he was on the right path. Only... there was no indication of the cart that had been targeted. Lex had to assume that whoever the driver was, Gerard most likely, had somehow survived.

All of them were driving the same cart? How had he even gained such a lead? Lex was genuinely curious now, and decided to watch a replay of the race after it was over. But it wasn't over yet.

The track led into the massive forest that surrounded the greenhouse. This would be tricky, as he had repeatedly strengthened the formation that would disrupt an intruder's sense of direction if they ventured in too deeply, and currently he would be classified as an intruder.

For once Lex withdrew his spirit sense back in, so as to not accidentally touch the formation, and readied himself for an interesting drive.

But something unexpected happened. Mary appeared sitting on his shoulder, dressed up in the attire of a racers pit crew.

"There's a situation. I would have waited to contact you, but there's a guest who wants to meet with you and they're claiming it's extremely urgent."

Even though Lex paid attention to what Mary said, his focus on the track had not dropped. His latest increase in cultivation made it so he could easily divide his mind into separate tasks without influencing one another, so even if he had full-fledged conversations with Mary, the amount of focus he would give to his driving would remain undiluted.

"Who's the guest?" he asked out of curiosity. Since Mary herself said the situation was urgent, he doubted it was an ordinary guest.

"It's emperor Jotun and general Ragnar, alongside a lady I believe is the emperor's wife. They all look... agitated."

The emperor, the empress and the general. If they had all come together for an urgent matter, it wasn't something Lex could ignore.

"Send them to my office," he said, deciding to meet them with his projection.

"They're already there."

Considering the fact that they wanted to meet urgently, Lex wasn't surprised that they were already waiting for his office. He used his Remote Presence to create a projection of himself sitting at his desk.

Merely a moment later, the trio entered the room, allowing Lex to analyze them. He immediately realized a couple of interesting things. First, while Mary had said they were agitated, a more apt description would be that they seemed excited. It was not alarm or worry that painted their faces, but suppressed elation. Second, the 6th sense he had gained from the Mystery trial could be used even through his projection! Although he had yet to say anything, he could feel it activate in preparation for the conversation they were about to happen.

But before he began the conversation, he observed the woman and checked her status.

Name: Elinor Jotun

Age: 298,555

Sex: Female

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

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Stop ogling at married women.

Elinor looked more mature than her husband, though that in no way diminished her beauty. But it was not because of her beauty that Lex was paying special attention to her. It was the fact that both her eyes were of different colors.

Such a thing was actually not uncommon, in mortals at least. In Elinor's case, however, it was not so simple. Although his instincts and intuition usually failed him when it came to those whose cultivation was far higher than his own, at this moment it was telling him that if he had looked at her eyes through his left eye, and not through his projection, he would be seeing something else.

But such things did not matter, for the moment at least. Lex did not wait, nor did he start the meeting with a casual conversation like their previous encounter, and instead directly asked the emperor, "is something the matter? I was told that you wanted to meet urgently."

"Innkeeper, I wanted to make a request, though I am afraid it might seem improper."

"Oh? What is it?"

"Among the many Minor realms that you have opened up for guests, there is one that is of special interest to us. I was hoping to ask for exclusive rights to that realm... at least for a time?"

The request was truly unexpected, and not at all in line with anything he was expecting. But he did not fall into a stupor at the request and immediately drew a conclusion that the emperor found something even he found valuable. Even Lex was curious now.

"As you probably know," began Lex in a somber tone, "the Inn is currently having an event. Blocking off or making certain realms exclusive to certain groups during the event... well, it is certainly not what was planned."

The three did not try to hide the anxiety on their faces as they heard Lex speak, or perhaps, due to his 6th sense, he was just more perceptive of the anxiety they felt. It was an interesting ability which allowed him to feel that he held all the power during this conversation. He did not need to beat around

the bush to get them to reveal their motives, like he would have to do if he were using a different identity.

"Of course, that does not mean it can't be arranged. But I'm curious - why would you pay so much attention to this specific Minor realm?"

The trio instantly felt relief upon knowing that the task was achievable, and the emperor's mood even elevated immensely.

"Innkeeper, you probably already know that the history of my empire is very small," he began, as his thoughts drifted into eras past. "The history of the human race is longer than that, of course, but past a few hundred million years at most, nothing is recorded. Even if I use my authority to peruse the Henali records, I can, at most, look back a couple billion years to when the Henali arrived at the Origin realm. What was the Origin realm like before then? Who inhabited it? Did humans even exist in the Origin realm? These questions... I have never been able to find an answer to.

"Some, like the Henali themselves, think it doesn't really matter. After all, back then the realm was even younger than it is now. Any being or civilization that existed back then could only be weaker than those that exist now. Certainly, they would be much weaker than myself at this point."

Jotun paused to laugh, as if he had just said something amusing.

"But the mysteries of the universe are beyond what we can imagine? Once, in my youth, my father took my brothers and I to a secret pagoda, from which I gained the inheritance that brought me to where I am today. If the old civilizations were weak, how could they leave behind a heritage so powerful?"

"Just a short while ago, one of my soldiers discovered another pagoda in one of your Minor realms, almost identical to the one I entered in my youth. But even now, at the pinnacle of my strength, the pagoda remains as mysterious and elusive to me as it was back then. Although it might be selfish of me to deprive this opportunity to others, that you have so selflessly provided to everyone, but I have to try, nonetheless. After all, even in the greater realms, the situation for us humans is not so great. If through this pagoda, another great heritage for the human race is uncovered, it will be a boon for humans across the universe!"

The emperor provided a lot of information to Lex, not only about himself but about the situation relating to humans across the universe. But now was not the time to mull over such things. If this pagoda was so great, Lex himself was quite interested in it.

"You're talking about the benefit of the human race. What you're saying is that if I give you exclusive rights to the realm, you'll provide the heritage out to the humans instead of keeping it for yourself?"

"Innkeeper, since I have already been in the pagoda once, I know how hard it is to pass its tests. I cannot enter it myself due to its restrictions, and there is no guarantee that if I only let my own progeny enter, they will ever succeed. If I have exclusive rights to the realm, I can take my time and only allow those of reliable character to enter so they may try their luck. If not, then I can only take a gamble. I have already asked Ragnar to keep his men on standby. He has approximately 300 million soldiers under his command who qualify to enter the pagoda. I can only have them enter first, while I gather more men from elsewhere to keep on entering."