

## **Innkeeper 531**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 531: No negotiations

Multitasking was not really a problem for Lex anymore. The ability to split his mind to have each mind focus on a different task made it so. Moreover, the current situation only required him to have two separate trains of thought running - one focused on the racing and one focused on the conversation in his office. For a moment, however, he had to create a third split to mercilessly beat down the rising greedy, capitalistic side of himself from emerging.

The thought of 300 million soldiers passing through his Inn, with more on the way, set his imagination wild for how much MP he could print. But the reason he had to reign himself in was that he wasn't logistically prepared to handle such volume.

All the systems he had in place would suddenly become overcrowded and overburdened. As much as he liked New York, the crowded subway at peak hour was not something he wanted to emulate.

Besides, there were a few other opportunities for Lex to gain in this situation. After all, this mystical pagoda was connected to a Minor realm he controlled the entrance to. There was nothing stopping him from taking a tour in it himself. But he had to learn more about it first. He had a feeling Marlo was leaving out a lot of information about this pagoda.

"If your only aim is to propagate the strength of the human race, I do not see why you need to prevent others from accessing the realm. If there is a heritage suitable for the human race inside the pagoda, then humans from anywhere can reap the benefit."

"The pagoda does not have any specific heritage lying in wait inside. Instead, the heritage it delivers is designed according to whoever enters. The pagoda I entered in my youth was a part of a sect's training grounds. Other than humans, many other races benefited from it, even if they did so nominally.

"But the reason I want to make the realm exclusive is not because I don't want to share. When I finally reached the top floor in the pagoda, and passed its tests, the pagoda turned into a normal building and stopped giving out heritages. It is the final heritage that I want to reserve for the human race."

Lex's experience with alien races had been vastly out of the ordinary. Everyone he had met from the Jotun empire was filled with immense devotion towards bettering the human race, but back on earth, humans had proved that they weren't exactly saints themselves. The history of the earth was filled with horrid cruelty proving that his race was more than capable of being the villain in someone's story.

As such, he did not understand their particular devotion towards strengthening their own race rather than following the typical route of reserving the benefits for only themselves or their close relatives. Maybe wars between races were all too common in the universe and he just hadn't been exposed to them yet. Or maybe they were just a very altruistic bunch.

Either way, the opportunities provided by the pagoda seemed excellent, and Lex was not about to just give them up. If what Jotun said was true, even those who did not reach the final floor could gain some guidance, this could be the perfect thing to train his own workers.

Or at least give them experience outside of just what the Inn could provide. But first, he needed to learn a bit more about the pagoda.

"How long do you think it will take someone to reach the top floor of the pagoda if it were left open to the public?" he asked.

"That... is not easy to estimate. Since I know the value of the pagoda, I'll be sure to send in the best and brightest. But that in itself does not mean anything. The pagoda which I entered was so old, no one knew exactly how long it had been there. I suspect these are all relics from a distant past that have yet to achieve their purpose."

So basically, no one was likely to reach the top floor any time soon. Lex wasn't arrogant enough to believe that he could pass all its tests and reach the top - at least not without sufficient preparation. That wouldn't stop him from trying, though.

"I understand. Your motive of trying to improve the circumstances of your own race are quite pure and worth commending, but the fact remains that the Inn is currently having an event targeted to the masses. Tell me, other than the pagoda, what does that realm have? Do you know its size?"

Lex immediately felt the tension in the room rise back up, which he wanted, but there was also an unwanted reaction. Lex planned on the emperor trying to bargain or negotiating with the Innkeeper,

resulting in him earning a good sum of MP while also keeping a channel open for himself and the Inn's staff. But instead of trying to negotiate, Lex felt that the three were already gearing up for failsafe measures they had already planned out.

"We haven't done a thorough scan of its size, but an early estimate is that the Minor realm is between one to two million acres in size. The terrain is vibrant and supports some local wildlife, though no beasts or cultivators have been discovered so far."

"All-in-all, it seems like a nice spot for a vacation," said Lex with a smile. "It would be a shame if I give full access rights to just the Empire, especially during this event. After all, if I do that, I would have to do the same when others make similar requests. I cannot favor certain guests over others."

"I understand," the emperor said, assuming he had been rejected. As for negotiating? He had spent a very large amount of time with the Henali. He understood better than anyone else not to think too highly of himself and assume he could ask for favors when in front of beings of such power.

"But, I suppose there is something that can be done. After all, I cannot ignore long time guests either."

Lex looked towards Ragnar for a brief moment before continuing.

"How about this? Since only you have found the realm entrance, and no one else has entered, I'll make it so that this realm is exclusive for humans only. I'll move the entrance to the Immortal Bastion so that it's easier to access. Of course, since I am doing all of this, there is a price."

The three were genuinely surprised by the turnaround and then filled with extreme enthusiasm. The price did not matter, they were in a position to pay. In fact, Lex himself knew that he could at this moment extort a few trillion MP for this and they would not hesitate. But his deep-rooted understanding of the Innkeepers' prestige, as well as his sixth sense, let him know how crass it would seem to exchange a favor in place of some money.

So instead, he focused on something that would benefit him, but secretly.

"I have already stated that I will not interfere with what happens inside the Minor realms. Since you have requested this as a heritage site for the human race, and the entrance of the site is through the Inn, you will have to provide security for those humans entering for the sake of accessing the pagoda."

He knew how powerful the bloodlines for his workers were. If he was going to be sending them to the pagoda, he had to make sure no one tried to harm them secretly to extract their bloodlines or study them.

Speaking of which, he suddenly had an idea. Maybe he should find a relatively safer Minor realm and try to have the workers colonize it. They weren't lacking in any way, but since they were actual, living people, Lex wanted them to have lives outside of the Inn as well. Besides, it would be a good learning opportunity for them. New experiences were an integral part of developing one's personality.

The emperor was taken aback by the kind of price the Innkeeper mentioned, but then again it only made sense. The Innkeeper was an excellent host. He would, of course, be concerned about his guests' welfare.

The group started hashing out the details while they each made plans in their heads about how to move forward.

Back in the race... Lex was doing well, and he was approaching the end. Gerard was in sight, as well as a few other finalists. But his mood wasn't all that great.

He had outdone himself to gain so much ground while pulling those ahead of himself back. His incredible intuition had played an incredible role in helping him avoid almost all power-ups as well.

The one he wasn't able to avoid however...

Lex turned to his left and gave the black-hooded Xenmas, who was driving right beside him, the look of death. Unfortunately, with a chicken nest glued directly on top of his head with a mother hen sleeping inside of it, he did not look as intimidating. Above his cart was an entire chicken coop, filled with eggs and live chickens - not only distracting him, but increasing the weight of his cart as well.

The moment he found out who designed such an absurd power up, he would... he would... God only knew, but he would do something!

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 532: So close

Having a chicken coop above his cart served a greater purpose than cosmetic comedy. There was the obvious distraction of having an entire living being glued to his own head. But more than that, the coop completely ruined the aerodynamics of the already less than stellar design of the cart and added some weight to it as well.

Although the penalty was not permanent, considering that Lex was not first, and that there was tough competition around him, it... eggsacerbated his situation.

Lex winced at his own pun, but quickly diverted his attention back to the matter at hand. Gerard was in the lead, as expected, but he had been slowed down by a plough that was attached to his cart. He too had been a victim of someone's power up, and likely more than one over the course of the race or else he would have already finished the race .

Other than his own phenomenal driving, there was one very important reason why he was in the lead, as Lex eventually discovered. Unlike Z, who sucked the energy out of Lex's cart after crashing into it, Gerard was doing the same for every cart on the entire track!

Moreover, he was somehow getting away with it since he technically wasn't hurting anyone's cart, so it didn't count as an attack. Instead, Lex assumed that he was justifying it as defense by stating that he was simply keeping everyone away from himself.

Lex had no actual proof of this, but it was the conclusion he came to when he noticed a few things. First, he had originally used a defensive technique to escape the influence of the artificial gravity, but when he returned to the ground, he noticed that his cart was driving faster all of a sudden. He had not noticed earlier, since the difference had been so minute, but every cart was driving just a bit slower than what it should have been able to.

Gerard, with his unmatched skills, was able to turn that slight advantage into a huge lead. Of course, the reason he didn't outright shut all the carts down was because then the other racers would take

cautionary measures. If Lex was able to protect himself from Gerards influence, so would others. Instead, by being discrete, almost no one had noticed.

But even if the plan was ingenious, it was the implementation that bewildered Lex. His range was just too ridiculous. He wasn't able to help himself and checked the old man's status.

Name: Gerard

Age: 1

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Foundation mid

Species: Human

Bloodline: Regalia Bloom III

Remarks: An employee with abnormally high affinity for his bloodline. He has already gone through 2 mutations for a remarkably stable bloodline, making him nearly invincible below the immortal realm.

'Damn!' Lex exclaimed mentally. If the system considered him nearly invincible below the immortal realm, his real capabilities must be ridiculously insane.

But Lex was not demoralized. He himself was no pushover either, and he wasn't about to quit just because the competition was tough.

The chicken as well as the coop finally vanished from atop Lex and his vehicle, and he did not hesitate to use his final power up! A massive explosion occurred with Lex at the center, not only knocking Xenmas and a few others aside, it also brought up a massive smoke cloud obscuring the path.

Lex, of course, was completely fine and so was his cart due to his incredible defensive techniques. The incredibly tenacious Z was also unharmed for he simply absorbed the energy from the blast and channeled it to his cart's engine.

For a moment it seemed like the showdown was going to be Z, Lex and then Gerard. Lex had already been through the various parts of the Inn, around the new Immortal Bastion, over the Fire temple and many other points of interest. That was after he skipped so much of the track from falling off the ship.

By now they were returning to the village, and the stadium where their race had begun was in sight. The track was straightforward with no power ups in sight. The only chance Lex had was to make the best of the time where Gerards cart was still slowed down by a plough.

Somehow, Lex transitioned from the physically capable yet emotionally volatile berserk state to the flow state. He shut out the world and focused solely on the track, finding the best possible, and efficient most path on the track.

The cheers of the crowd in the distance disappeared. The sound of the raging wind vanished. The world around him began fading away. There was only him and the track, which also began to vanish. Eh?

Lex wasn't getting in the zone, someone had used an unavoidable power up on him or someone close to him. He was driving in a sensory deprivation bubble. Basically, as the name suggested, while inside the bubble all his senses would disappear.

The bubble would only last for 10 seconds, but would cover a massive area around the targeted cart. Damn it.

Lex closed his eyes, or maybe they were already closed. He pulled up his memory of what the track looked like and just drove according to his memory. Fortunately, the path was more or less straight. The only thing he had to be careful of was that he was driving up and down a series of small plateaus.

If he just simulated the speed he was going at, and the scenery according to his memory, he would be able to navigate the track correctly. Whoever had made a move should be behind him, and it couldn't have been Z for he was keeping a track of Z's power ups.

So, either another player was making a last-minute attempt to win this, or Xenmas was getting his revenge. Whoever it was had made a good play, but Lex wasn't out of this yet. Driving on the track out of pure memory, he maintained the most optimal path to overtake Gerard. At the same time, he employed a massive Talk to the Hand behind his cart. Overtaking him wasn't going to be as easy as the perpetrator thought.

Back at the stadium, the crowds were going wild. They had seen the cart which had snuck up on everyone, and had seen it strike Lex with the sensory deprivation bubble. They could tell that Lex could see or hear nothing.

Just as they prepared for Lex to lose control, and the new cart to overtake him, something unexpected happened. Lex continued to drive, making the barest possible changes to his path necessary to stay on track - all with his eyes closed! Moreover, as the new cart came, using its boosters to overtake Lex, it directly crashed into an invisible wall behind Lex!

Only, it did not handle it as flawlessly as Z had done so, and became completely disoriented.

"A good try to contender John, yet another employee of the Inn! He used invisibility throughout the race to stay hidden and protect himself, but he himself ended up ramming into an invisible wall!" exclaimed the commentator, who had jumped out of his commentary booth by now. He was standing on the roof of the commentary booth, his excitement keeping him from staying still.

"Despite all that, driver Leo maintains his position and steadily gains on cart number 01, driven by the ever popular Gerard! With his eyes closed no less!"

A short while later, when the sensory bubble vanished, Lex opened his eyes and found himself exactly where he imagined he'd be.

They had entered the stadium and the finish line was within sight. Gerard was still ahead, without anything dragging him back. Right behind him were Z and John, who were now contending with one another!

There wasn't enough time, and Lex had no power ups. He wouldn't be able to overtake Gerard, at least not normally.

He closed his eyes once again and reentered the berserk state. Time seemed to slow down as he focused all his strength to his legs, or rather, to his right leg. If he used a technique it would be a foul, but he had already confirmed that using his physical capabilities was not an issue.

Gerard was 30 feet (9 meters) away from the finish line. As fast as he possibly could, Lex jumped out of the cart and landed on his right foot. The crowd seemed to realize something was about to happen.

Lex let out a deep, angry yell and he pushed all the strength in his body through his single leg. The track cracked right under his foot and slowly began to form into a crater, but even as it was forming Lex had already vanished!

Like a bazooka Lex shot forward, suddenly overtaking the ever leading Gerard! Everything happened too fast. The commentator did not even have a chance to scream, let alone the bewildered crowd.

Exhilaration flooded Lex's veins as he saw the finish line. It was right in front of him. He could practically feel the ribbon hitting his body as he crossed.

But the feeling was overshadowed by a warning. Something was coming. But everything was happening too fast. By the time Lex felt the warning it was already too late, and a string connected itself to him, leading back to Gerard.

A POWER UP! But it was too late. The next second he and Gerard had swapped places. He was behind and Gerard was at the finish line.

Dammit, he had been saving his power ups!

The next moment, instead of the siren of victory, the sound of a loud crash filled the stadium. Although Lex and Gerard had swapped places, Lex left his Talk to the Hand right behind the finish line!

Even if the skilled driver was capable of overcoming it using his bloodline, he would have to anticipate it first. The swap between them had been too quick, and they had been moving too fast for the racer to realize it was there.

The next moment, Lex crossed the finish line, and the sound of laughter filled the air.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 533: The big devil

The crowds went wild at Lex's victory, even if most of them didn't actually understand what actually happened. In the last couple of seconds the exchange between Lex and Gerard has been too difficult for most of the crowds to follow, but that didn't deprive them of feeling the intensity of the moment.

Moreover, as soon as Lex won, the various screens changed from following other racers and all either focused on Lex, or began to play a slowed down replay of the final moments.

The number of tricks involved made for a truly remarkable spectacle. From the get go, Lex's speed boost using his physical body was not only unexpected, it was staggering to behold. Even if he were a body cultivator, getting that kind of acceleration was far out of the ordinary. In fact, had Lex been purely cultivating the Regal Embrace it would have never happened. But his body had undergone too many upgrades. His body was sturdy enough to tolerate the ridiculous burst of power his many upgrades gave to him. Anyone else would have been reduced to destroying their own bodies every time they exhibited their strength. The fact that he could easily switch his states also helped tremendously. In the last moment he had entered the berserk state which heavily boosted his physical prowess beyond what he could normally output.

In exchange for all that destructive power, all Lex felt was slightly exhausted and a bit of soreness in his leg. It couldn't be helped, his body's defense just made him too durable.

The quick wit displayed by both Gerard and Lex after Lex made his final move just made for too exciting a finish. The crowds had long entered into a standing ovation, though neither Lex nor Gerard seemed to have noticed.

Lex himself was basking in the exhilaration of the victory. Lately, any kind of excitement in his life had to do with putting his life on the line. It was great to finally be able to have something nonlethal get his adrenaline pumping.

He truly only cared about the challenge the race had provided. The first place obviously got a number of awards and accolades, such as a trophy, some MP, some other free vouchers for certain services at the Inn. But none of that really mattered to him.

The race had been a nice break from all the work he had been doing, and he knew that he wouldn't have time for anything like this again soon. Even as his cart came to a stop and he finally began to notice the cheering crowds, most of his attention had already been diverted back to his office.

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The Innkeeper, the emperor, his wife and the general had spent some time discussing plans for the Minor realm. The Innkeeper had stated that the empire should be in charge of safety inside the Minor realm, which was no problem at all for the massive empire, excluding a single hiccup.

Although the pagoda offered excellent benefits to those that traversed its levels, it had one caveat: the tests each floor presented could absolutely be lethal. The only way to exit the pagoda was at the entrance to each floor. Once a participant entered a new floor, they could choose to exit via a teleportation formation, or continue forward. Continuing on didn't mean they couldn't come back, but from what the emperor recalled, deaths inside the pagoda were all too common.

Besides any deaths inside the pagoda, the emperor promised the strictest of securities, due to how seriously they treated the pagoda. He even elaborated on the kind of deployment the emperor planned, during which Lex learned a new term: Heaven Immortal. Although no one explained to him, Lex concluded that it was the level directly or soon after Earth Immortal.

The reason it was brought up was because the Emperor planned on having at least one person of such a cultivation realm present inside the Minor realm at all times.

Based on how the general and the empress reacted, cultivators in this realm were considered sufficiently powerful.

It was good to know, but it did not matter to Lex at the moment. Instead, he took this opportunity to inform the emperor about the Inheritance Lounge as well. The reason why it was not popular, and almost no one knew of it, was because it required a level 4 Midnight Inn prestige to use. Since he was looking to strengthen the human race, that would also be a good way. Incidentally, Lex would also earn some MP along the way, but that was beside the point.

The emperor was intrigued and immediately began planning to investigate it, while Lex silently started planning a couple of things of his own. It was just too convenient.

For a time, he thought that the problems faced by earth were beyond him, and he more or less accepted it. He had detached himself from the planet, and only kept abreast of its situation due to his nostalgic feelings. He also felt a certain level of indignation, knowing that the earth and all its peoples had been treated as pawns in a game by some prisoners.

He had planned on using the empire to take control of earth from whoever was controlling it at the moment, for at least what he had seen of the empire so far was pretty good. Until it was revealed to him that the earth was already, in some manner, under the purview of the empire.

Too much of the conversation that happened inside the chamber of secrets had been wiped from his memory, but none of that mattered now. He had direct access to the actual ruler of the empire, so he was sure he could somehow use that to his benefit and allow circumstances on earth to improve.

But at the same time, he as the Innkeeper, couldn't randomly bring up earth. But the pieces were falling perfectly into place for him, as if he was destined to help earth all along. Marlo had lost his patience, and was about to make a move against the prisoners who had been manipulating the earth, the repercussions be damned.

Larry was actually planning on joining him, and had even invited Lex. But the way Lex saw it, him joining the attack did not contribute in a meaningful way. Instead, by strengthening his relationship with the empire directly, he could then 'casually mention' the issue to the emperor or general using his alternate identity. Although it wouldn't be the same as the Innkeeper mentioning it, due to the increasingly close ties the Inn had with the empire, he couldn't see them turning him down.

Yes, this was a much more practical and viable solution. At the same time, it was also slowly strengthening the Inn. It was a win-win in his book.

Once the emperor left, Lex began planning his next actions. He had to keep an eye out for a Minor realm suitable for the Inn workers only. He also had to go explore the dangers of the pagoda himself.

Once he got a good sense of how dangerous it was, he could plan how to start sending his workers to the pagoda.

He also had to remember to look over the next phase of the festival going on. Now that the Grand Prix had come to a conclusion, the next big event was supposed to begin. Although the races would now become a staple of the Inn, he wouldn't be focusing all his resources on promoting just that.

Although, in Lex's mind, the next event wasn't too exciting, it had potential. He also...

There was a knock on his office door, interrupting his flow of thoughts. That was strange.

"Come in," said Lex.

Luthor opened the door and said, "Innkeeper, there's a guest here who wishes to meet with you. If you'd like, I can schedule a meeting for later, or turn him away."

It felt strange that Luthor was informing him of this as usually Mary was one who would pop up and let him know of these things, but then again, Luthor was his secretary. It only made sense that if anyone approached the office, Luthor would be the one they'd interact with.

"Sure, send them in," Lex said as he cleared his thoughts. While his planning was important, anyone who could bear the pressure of his office and ask to meet him would be worth giving his attention to.

Perhaps deterring the undetermined was also one of the reasons the hall right outside his office radiated such an intimidating aura.

A person dressed in a long, brown trench coat walked in, a small black notepad in his hand. The coat hid his entire body, and the fedora he was wearing hid his face well. Lex felt like he was in front of a detective from a black and white movie.

Until, that is, he scanned the person. The guest was a devil and, coincidentally, his name was one that was all too famous on Earth.

Name: Rocketfellow Rothsfather.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 534: Business

Zagan stumbled through the door once again, his humanoid body battered and bruised much worse than ever before. It never occurred to him how strange it was for a monster born of darkness to take on a human form. It was as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Though he was in bad condition, his concern extended to none of that. His eyes wandered the familiar room in search of something, and when he saw the resplendent Alysha disappointment welled up in his chest, though maybe deep down, he was also happy.

"Why are you still here?" he asked as he tried to wipe the blood off his face. "You should have left long ago."

The moment he finished his words, a door appeared behind Alysha as if signaling a way out. Yet she did not hesitate to once again pick up her med kit and approach the bleeding humanoid-monster.

"Why do you keep going back?" she asked, instead of answering his question. "Everytime you go through that door you only come back worse for wear. What are you looking for?"

She moved his hair from his forehead to see a massive cut, bleeding into his eyes. With a sigh she got to work, washing all his wounds. By now she knew he was not so delicate that he would die from these wounds, so she always prioritized cleaning them first so she would have a good understanding of his actual condition.

"I don't know," Zagan whispered as he closed his eyes. A moment later, he felt the cold water she poured over his face. "I guess I... I'm searching for something that will... provide me with meaning."

As a monster born from darkness, he was not actually afraid of light, but the more time he spent in darkness, the stronger he would go. Monsters from the crystal realm were born with limited intelligence, so they compensated for it by having extremely strong instincts that would guide their actions.

Zagan had lived for millions of years, and so had grown to the level where he achieved self awareness and a decent amount of intelligence, yet he continued to act in accordance with his instincts. Yet over time, he began to wonder why it was he listened to his instincts. What was it they were leading him towards? Was there something more? Was there a point to being alive?

These questions did not elicit any strong emotions from the monster, as it did not quite have the emotional range of naturally born animals. Still, with time, a subtle curiosity had taken hold of his mind. Lately, his curiosity was being tingled by Alysha. Why would she always treat him? He knew she was alone during the time he left, and unlike him, she did not like being alone. Still, she never left. Why?

Unlike Zagan, Alysha's thought process was a lot simpler. Though she happened to have forgotten her life, the feeling of loneliness and abandonment stayed with her. There was no one around to help her when she needed it, for a very long time. So if someone else needed her help, she would not abandon them. It was that simple.

Unknown to both of them, their each and every action was being judged and measured. Zagan had actually been failing his test miserably, mostly because he did not understand what was required of him. That all changed when he interacted with Alysha. The parameters of his test changed, and while he was failing the test for his original role, he seemed to be acing the test for his new one. Soon, both their tests would come to an end.

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Lex scanned the devil and read the results.

Name: Rocketfellow Rothsfather

Age: 44 (fake)

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Golden Core early (fake)

Species: Devil

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Don't let appearances fool you, this devil is rich! His trenchcoat alone is worth several MTs!

There were a few interesting things to note in the status, the name of the devil being only one. The name was so popular and influential, he doubted there were barely a few working adults on the planet who had never heard the name. Though not everyone understood the full gravity behind the name, it was enough to understand that they were incredibly rich.

In fact, in one of the files filled with rumors that Velma had given him revealed that the patriarch of both those families were also actually political prisoners being held on the planet.

But compared to those who were instigating wars and conflicts for entertainment purposes, those two seemed pretty tame.

The second thing that interested Lex was the man's name and cultivation. They had a 'fake' written in front of them, which is something Lex had never seen before. When he focused on the word, more information was revealed stating that the man's actual details were being hidden by the trenchcoat he was wearing. The system could detect the interference, but could not overcome it. Just that on its own was a great testament to the man's background and depth. Lex did not treat him lightly at all.

"I hope you were not waiting for too long," said Lex with his usual warm tone. Regardless of the man's background or depth, the 'Innkeeper' would not be phased by it.

"The fault is my own for showing up unannounced," Rocketfellow said with a fairly warm tone of his own. Much of his face remained hidden behind his trenchcoat so Lex could not see his expression, but his tone at least was earnest and calm. Moreover, using his 6th sense, Lex could tell the devil had reacted normally to his statement.

"Please, Mr. Innkeeper, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Rocketfellow Rothsfather, and I am a businessman. I absolutely fell in love with your Midnight Inn when I first saw it, and wanted to form a joint venture with you immediately! But, for the first time in my life, my scope was too small to match

up to your establishment. Although I am still working on that, and have a few plans, for now, there is one other business idea I would like to talk to you about."

"The Midnight Inn is open to all guests, and so naturally, is also open to your business as well. Please, tell me, how can I help you."

The extremely formal devil opened the small black notebook in his hand and showed Lex a list of names. Immediately he picked up on a few familiar ones: Leo, Gerard, Z, Luthor. At first he thought the list was based around the Inn workers, but then he began to see other names, belonging to the various guests.

He was confused and he was unable to pick out any significant detail connecting all the people, except for the fact that they were all male.

Instead of making an unfounded guess, Lex remained silent and waited for the devil to elaborate, which he soon did.

"I'm sure you're able to see what connects all these names," the devil said with a hint of excitement. "At first, when I realized the potential, I thought it was too good to be true. I waited patiently to be proved wrong, but when nothing happened, I had to pinch myself. I've hardly ever seen anyone miss out on such an obvious business opportunity like this. Mr. Innkeeper, after I watched the Lady Cosmos fashion show, I was awaiting the arrival of the Mr. Cosmos show, but it never came!

"Obviously whoever had the idea first never thought to extend the show to the other gender, but I think it's a huge waste! Obviously I can't reuse the same name as I want to build my own brand, and I want to do things a little differently as well! Instead of just beauty, I want to focus on strength and cultivation as well. After all, men are looked at differently than women. But there's so much more than that.

"Mr. Innkeeper, I know that if I simply want to host my own competition it should not be a problem, but what if I want to partner with the Inn itself? Or, if that's not on the table, how can I get some of the Inn's workers to participate in my event! I've never seen anyone with a fan club as dedicated as Gerard, and I don't know if you know this, but the recent performance of Leo has managed to grow his popularity quite a bit as well. Now just imagine, after we work out the kinks, your workers' faces are known across the universe, not only because of the Inn, but because they finally get the recognition their good looks deserve!"

This... was not what Lex had been expecting from this meeting. Let alone his own Leo persona, he didn't want to let any of his workers near this weird trench coat creep! Has he been stalking them?

"I'm thinking, since the first show will be a test run to figure out how to run the competition, of keeping a small budget of 5 MTs. What do you think?"

"Mr. Rothsfather, the Midnight Inn is exactly the best place to launch your endeavor. I want to congratulate you in advance for a successful venture."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 535: Burden

Alexander Morrison was waiting for his next deployment, still at the Midnight Inn. After immense effort on his part, he had proved himself worthy of undergoing special training by the empire. Due to his unique situation, regardless of what he did it was more or less assumed that Alexander would never have full loyalty to the empire.

As such, he could not get in touch with their unique or specialized training, reserved for their most trusted elites, but he had managed to improve his situation nonetheless. To test out his new capabilities, he sparred a few times with his family's strongest. In an upfront fight, he still could not defeat his grandfather, but the old man admitted that Alexander put a lot of pressure on him.

Of course, that could not be a true test, for both Alexander and his grandfather were holding back immensely as well. Alexander knew that if he were going for the kill, he would have behaved differently. Still, being unable to overwhelm his grandfather disappointed him somewhat.

He had learned much of the empire, and learned about noble families. While it could not be claimed that such feats were common, it was at least not unheard of for the scions of noble families to be able to completely overwhelm even those at higher realms.

A part of him wondered how far he was from their level. He even pondered what the difference was between himself and his old teacher Marlo when he was at the Golden Core realm. A part of him told him that he would lose a spar, but in a fight to the death anything was possible.

Instead of being proud of his achievements, he felt frustrated that even after everything he went through, he was still only on par with the peak of those from his home planet. Then again, he had not been cultivating for very long.

Speaking of which, had his birthday passed? He couldn't remember. The empire obviously followed their own calendar system, and he never really put any real effort into remembering it. He'd never really paid attention to any of his birthdays, except his 15th for obvious reasons. It was always Helen who...

"Captain Alexander!" a soldier called out, breaking him free from his reverie. On instinct he stood to attention as he saw a small group of soldiers walking towards him, holding what looked like a backpack. His eyes shone. That was...

"You have new orders, captain," the soldier said, as he presented Alexander with a tablet. Familiar with what was happening, Alexander put his hand on the tablet as it verified his identity. The empire's technology was heads and tails ahead of earth, so even though the device looked similar to stuff available on earth, its actual functionality was far beyond anything he had ever seen.

It was a spirit tech device that verified Alexander's identity using things such as his finger print, DNA, spirit energy signature, the specific meridian patterns in his hand and many other things he had no idea about.

Once his identity was confirmed, though, the soldier passed him the backpack and began briefing him on his new orders.

"The specific details are on a need to know basis, but essentially high-level empire officials have entered into a partnership with the Midnight Inn to take control of a specific Minor realm. Your new orders..."

Across the Inn, countless other empire officials were receiving similar orders. As of now, very select few were being informed about the minor realm and exactly how much importance the emperor put on it. The seemingly laid back emperor had decided that he had spent enough time away from his empire. Once his latest mission for the Henali was over, he would return to do some house cleaning. Unlike Ragnar, who was more lenient of humans, the emperor was not so clement in his treatment. The reason why the empire was so strong, and had never suffered from any rebellions, was because basically anyone with any rebellious tendencies was dead. He did not expect others to be grateful for all that he worked for, but if they thought to take advantage of him, they had another thing coming.

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"Mr. Rothsfather, for the last time, although I can give your business my full support, I cannot force anyone to participate. Besides, my workers have their own duties to take care of."

"Innkeeper, you have to understand, the influence of celebrities is massive for events like these. While we can obviously hire or attract external celebrities for the event, if we leverage the growing fanbase of local stars such as Gerard, Leo or Z, not only will we have an easier time gaining a loyal fanbase, it will even benefit your own Inn."

Lex smiled. For the past 15 minutes, they had been going over the same argument. No matter how much sense he made, he was destined to win because as 'Leo' he was never going to participate in a fashion show. As entertaining as it sounded, he had better things to do.

Ultimately, the devil relented and promised that he would soon return with a full plan for everything he had planned for the event. Then he would work with the Inn to see how much of his vision could be accomplished.

After the meeting, the devil exited the office, and then disappeared from the Inn. He appeared in a room where a few devils were waiting for his return.

"So? How was it?"

"Plan A for bringing the Inn's workforce away from the Inn has failed. I'll continue with the show regardless as it can benefit many of our other plans. In the meantime, begin plan B. The Midnight Inn employees are the perfect canvas to turn into demons, we have to get our hands on them."

"I told you it was too easy," replied one of the people in the room.

"Regardless, it was worth a try. Here's a list of our primary targets. Other than the Inn's employees, begin tracking their location."

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Once the meeting with the devil was over, Lex spent some time planning out his next few actions. Since the Grand Prix was over, it was time to get ready for the next event which would start tomorrow.

He still did not know what to think of this event, for compared to the exciting amusement parks and races, it was a far cry. But it was good to shake things up.

One of the features the Inn unlocked, but almost no one paid attention to, was the Fishing well. The well was connected to worlds that the Inn was linked to, though the Inter-realm broadcast spread that to the entire realms that the Inn was connected to. Through the well, guests could fish for unowned items.

Basically, any item within the domain that was connected to the Inn, and which had no owner, could be fished for through the fishing well. Of course, what item a person fished up was completely random and based on luck. So you could get something simple and mundane, such as a random rock or a seashell. Or, you could get a phenomenal treasure that could change your life around.

It sounded amusing, but at the same time, it sounded like a scam. That, alongside the fact that Lex had priced each fishing attempt at 5000 MP per attempt, led to the fact that no one had ever tried to fish at all.

He figured this unusual feature required some marketing, so the next event would be a fishing attempt. Participants could fish for free, and whoever pulled up the best reward could move forward in the rounds. Each round would eliminate half the participants, or as near to half as possible, until there would be one winner. How successful or exciting the event would be was... well it left a lot of room for speculation. Still, it wasn't as it hurt to try. On the off chance that one of the participants pulled out something spectacular, the attention due to the event would raise the well's popularity. If not, then it could be a prop that Lex could use to look like he was wise and enlightened by fishing in it, like the teachers in kung fu movies.

While he was making preparations for the event, the Inn was still celebrating the end of the race. Although Gerard had ultimately lost, he took his defeat gracefully. Strangely though, his defeat did not negatively affect his popularity at all. If anything, his popularity shot through the roof.

The fan club which had originally started out as a group of grandma's who liked to be driven around by Gerard now had tens of thousands of legitimate fan, and with each moment, that number seemed to be

growing. In fact, Leo, the actual winner of the race, seemed to have been forgotten to the side while the crowd tossed the old man in the air and cheered for him.

As for Gerard himself... he was lamenting the negative side effects of his bloodline. Although he became more powerful every time his bloodline evolved, a negative side effect of his bloodline was that it would make him increasingly beautiful as it grew stronger, without taking away from his masculinity.

The worker sighed in his heart as he could not let the guests see him lament. Beauty was such a burden.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 536: Prelude

Lex felt pretty good about how things were going in general, especially after the race. He reminded himself to let off a little steam now and again. There was nothing about the Innkeeper that said he had to stay serious all the time. As much as he had to overview everything and make sure everything was running smoothly, he should also enjoy the Inns amenities himself.

Though, he couldn't say that he was disappointed that Gerard was, as it was called, 'suffering from success' rather than him. Even from a distance he could see him being thrown up and down in the air by the crowd. Lex had heard things about crowd surfing that he'd rather not experience himself. Better Gerard than him.

He turned his attention towards the next event. He did not think a stadium was a fitting venue for the fishing tournament, so he had to pick another spot. He teleported to a small lake near the village and found the place to be suitable. The area was filled with small hills with gentle slopes and a few scattered yet large trees.

He moved the well to a clearing at the base of a hill and placed wooden benches all around. He formed stalls that would sell food and placed a few grills nearby. The workers would man some of the grills, but some would be left in case the guests felt like cooking on their own.

Single, wooden swings were attached to the branches of the trees. Bonfire pits were created and a few, fixed huts were placed here and there.

He couldn't consult the turtle as it was still occupied, so after talking to the gardener Lex placed various bushes in the area that grew edible berries and fruits.

Compared to the festive and exciting events such as the grand prix or the amusement park, this event felt much more calm and homely. Lex wanted to turn this place into a permanent camping spot. He even placed a few fishing boats in the lake in case anyone felt the itch after watching the tournament.

He told the planning division to take care of any last minute touches the place needed, but should stay in keeping with the theme of camping.

He spent the next few hours taking care of a few miscellaneous issues relating to the Inn, such as a few other guests who wanted to meet him, approve the latest worker rotations for the Immortal Bastion and set prices for the new food being grown from the new desert farm.

For one of the tasks, he called Luthor to his office.

"You called, Innkeeper?" he asked as he stepped in. To his great disappointment, the Innkeeper did not give him as many tasks as he hoped. It was only once in a while that the Innkeeper assigned him a task. He thought it might be because of his previous failure where he proposed plans that the Innkeeper didn't like. He was determined to change.

"I'm sure you're aware of the event going on related to Minor realms at the Inn," the Innkeeper said, looking up from his work. "I've tasked a few workers to compile a detailed list of all the realms discovered and their conditions. I want you to go over that list and find a realm suitable for the workers. I plan on having all the Inns employees colonize that realm."

"You- you're sending us away?" he asked, alarmed!

"No, no that's not what I mean," the Innkeeper said, chuckling when he realized how Luthor had perceived it. "Right now, the only thing most of the workers know is the Midnight Inn. While that is not a bad thing, if they never experience normal life, or what the rest of the universe is like, their growth will be completely stunted. They will lack an understanding of common experiences, which will not only taint their world view, it will keep them from understanding the guests' perspectives. If they lack such perspective, how can they better serve the guests?"

Realization dawned on Luthor. This was not a punishment, but a reward as well as a test! The Innkeeper was trusting them with more responsibility to see how they performed. On one hand it provided them a peek into life outside the Inn, while on the other hand it tested their survival skills without the handholding of the Innkeeper.

In truth, Lex just felt bad. He treated the Midnight Inn like his home, so the workers naturally took the place of his family. As great as the Inn was, if they were never allowed to leave then what would be the difference between this and a prison? But at the same time, he did not want to send them to other worlds yet. They were too weak.

Speaking of weakness, Lex had been stuck in a unique conundrum of late. Although he had given Jotun his response to the Henali's requests, he did not know how they would react. While he could not give up his strong front, he also could not afford to cross them. He had not forgotten how simply entering their conference room, of sorts, was enough to put Lex into a coma.

Lately he had begun thinking of returning to the Crystal realm to complete his quest. If he could have the Midnight Inn exit the Origin realm, he would not be beholden to the Henali any longer. But he decided to wait till they gave their response before making any judgments. He had spent a long time in the Crystal realm, and he did not feel eager to return. Besides, the Inn was flourishing now that he could give it all his attention.

"I'll get it done," said Luthor with conviction. "Do you have any special requirements in mind?"

"Pick a suitable place, that's all. While I'll give you a starting budget for your colonization, after that everyone will have to rely on harvesting local resources to cater to your needs. You can take a poll to see what kind of environment everyone would like."

"It will be done!" he said with vigor, before excusing himself.

With that out of the way, Lex was momentarily done with all tasks that urgently required his attention. There was always more work to be done, but nothing that he needed to take care of at that exact moment. So he turned his attention to personal matters.

Using his personal hologram, he sent Larry a message.

"Larry, there's been a change of plans. I won't be joining you and Marlo, but I've found a way we can avoid any negative repercussions of attacking those prisoners. Thoroughly document everything they've done, or as much as you can, and try to get a confession from them if possible. Make a good case for why earth, even as a part of the empire, has been severely neglected and its people have been left to suffer. Once you're done, give me everything you've gathered. If things go according to plan, not only will we avoid any fallout, the situation on earth will drastically improve."

After sending the message Lex couldn't help but sigh. His connection to the empire will greatly benefit his home planet, even if he had decided to leave it behind. It seemed like he had a magic touch. Everything just got better under his influence.

Lex chuckled. Such thoughts were too self absorbed, even for him. In truth, he was a man in an extremely precarious situation putting on an excellent balancing act.

With that done, and everything else being handled well enough by the system, Lex couldn't help but turn his attention towards the new Minor realm that had been given to the empire. He was a little curious about this pagoda. If he wanted it to serve as a training ground for his workers, he first needed to get a deeper understanding of its difficulty.

After a quick scan that showed that William was still at the manor, Lex decided to pay the pagoda a visit. He was curious to see how difficult these trials really were. He did not at all harbor any thoughts that he might complete all the trials in a single go, thereby gaining an incredible heritage that put him on the same level as the emperor. It was not like he had begun to suffer from an MC complex.

Yes, he was totally just going to scope it out. He teleported to his room to change, but then realized he hadn't really gotten any new gear to suit his new realm. With a shrug, he changed into jeans and a T-shirt, and teleported to the Immortal Bastion.

"Mary, I'm going to be a little busy for a while, so if anyone has a tribulation similar to the one Ragnar had, warn me well in advance so I can set enough formations."

He really could not think of anything else going wrong while he was away. He had taken precautions against everything he could think of, and had enough guards to protect the Inn in case other trouble makers arrived. Besides, he would only be gone for a short time. What's the worst that could happen?

Shortly after Lex entered the Minor realm, Adrus who had spent an extended amount of time at the Inn finally returned to Earth. Not everyone was a multi billionaire. As much as he wanted to continue to party at the Inn, he couldn't afford it!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 537: Not building suspense

For a long time now, Larry had been living at the Midnight Inn. Using the Guild room to make some money made it very easy for him to stay there indefinitely, and the conveniences it offered made it the preferable choice - not to mention the perpetual safety from assassinations it offered.

It also allowed him to get his hands on resources and gear that he'd never be able to find on earth.

He'd rented a courtyard where he mostly lived by himself though his girlfriend spent a lot of time there as well. The most convenient thing about having his own place at the Inn though was that he could build his setup as he desired without fear of someone breaking in and getting their hands on his stuff.

Dozens of screens were attached to walls in the room he was in, completely isolated from the noise of the many servers he had stacked in the next room. The phenomenal temperature control at the Inn kept the servers running at optimal speeds without ever heating up. Though at the moment, his machines weren't doing anything processor heavy. Various videos played on the different screens, all of them muted. They depicted the various defenses around the place they were about to venture into.

Larry kept his gaze fixed on one massive temple, even as his attention was diverted towards Lex's message. So basically, he didn't need to worry about getting in trouble as long as he collected plenty of evidence?

He didn't show much of a reaction on his face as he put on his gear. He was not disappointed because of Lex's absence in the mission. No, his only thought was on the mission ahead of him. Today... he would finally face the man responsible for everything that happened to him.

He teleported out of the Inn.

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Alexander resisted the urge to groan. Although he could not say the challenge he faced was completely inconceivable, it definitely wasn't what he had expected when he heard of the pagoda.

His body was still getting used to the incredibly heavy gravity in the room. It was not just a matter of warming up his muscles or activating his spirit energy. Every single function in his body had come under an additional stress that it had to fight against.

His spirit energy felt heavier as he channeled it, slowing down all his techniques. His blood was pulled away from his brain and towards his legs, forcing his body to put in extra work just to keep that from happening. The air itself felt heavy in his lungs, making it difficult for the oxygen to diffuse into his blood without hurting his lungs themselves.

All of that was happening simultaneously and continuously. He did not know how much stronger the gravity was. His brain was not some kind of machine that could accurately calculate that the gravity was X times heavier than normal, causing him to expend Y% more energy.

All he knew was... his defensive armor came with a cup that was crushing him! After taking a moment to adjust himself, he felt much more comfortable. Or at least, as comfortable as he could be given the situation.

He stood at the very entrance of the pagoda, and in front of him was a line etched into the ground. Once he crossed the line, his first trial would officially begin.

"Picked a bad time to start but... oh well." He used a special technique, activating his backpack causing it to change form. It began wrapping itself around him, not forming an armor, but a skeletal frame. When it was complete, it revealed itself to be an exosuit!

Not only did the suit compliment all of his physical capabilities exponentially, it was the first step in mastering some of the strongest weapons the empire had to offer.

As he stepped forward, Alexander's eyes carried none of the hesitation or confusion he had been feeling the past few days. While there was a part of him that felt things he could not understand, there was also an overwhelming part of him that craved the challenge before him. He would become the best, slowly but steadily.

He took a step forward.

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Lex had moved the entrance to the Minor realm he took to calling the Pagoda realm - out of sheer convenience - to the Immortal Bastion. He expected it to be devoid of any crowds since the Bastion was not so popular yet, and the empire had only just gotten its hands on the realm. He was sorely mistaken.

A neat and orderly line of soldiers moved through the realm entrance, completely unprompted by anyone. He attributed it to the discipline of the army, and got in line himself.

A young man dressed casually, he stood out from the crowd of armored soldiers, though no one paid too much attention to him.

When it was finally Lex's turn and he entered the realm, he was stunned. Already having experienced teleportation besides the one caused by the golden keys, he was ready for the uneasy feeling.

What he was not ready for, however, was the extremely well developed alley he would come out to. It had only been a few hours since he told Jotun that they would take control of the realm so he did not really expect any real results.

At most he expected the empire would mobilize some forces and occupy the realm, before slowly developing certain parts of it. After all, not everyone had access to a magical system that would spawn buildings out of thin air.

He did not account for the fact that in place of that, the empire had massive, extremely sophisticated 3D printers that were literally building a fort around Lex before his very eyes.

Someone bumped into him, waking him from his reverie and reminding him to step out of the way of the entrance.

After apologizing, Lex moved to the side so he could actually admire the work the empire was doing.

Around the entrance to the realm, which had taken the shape of a door frame filled with white light through which people came, the empire had built a simple yet elegant patio. He expected they would change that in the future, but for now, it made for a beautiful entrance and exit to the realm.

He expected that the entrance had originally been placed in the wild, but it did not look that way right now. A tiled road had already been built in front of the entrance, going straight. He expected that it would eventually lead to a gate, or perhaps a security check through which everyone would pass. For now, it ended near a wall that was being built at the very moment, forming the periphery for a massive, rectangular fort!

There were a few ships flying around in the air above him, perhaps scanning and surveying the area. What Lex didn't understand was, when and how these machines got here. Lex had not seen them at the Inn, which meant that the empire probably brought parts and constructed them right here in the realm!

The soldiers who were entering the realm were all reporting to various stations, from where they were being sent in every direction. He could imagine that in only a few days, this place would undergo a complete makeover.

But regardless of how amazing the technology of the empire seemed, and how amazing the end result was, it lacked the finish that the Inn gave! But it was not like he was accusing them of being lacking. They were already incredible enough by coming close.

Lex stepped forward and asked someone for directions to the pagoda, for he couldn't exactly see it anywhere on the horizon.

The soldier informed him that it was actually not that close to the entrance and offered him a spot in one of the ships flying around in the air.

He promptly agreed and soon found himself climbing aboard the sleek aircraft called Slingshot alongside a few other soldiers heading in the same direction.

"Why is it called Slingshot?" Lex asked the soldier sitting next to him, confused. The design did not really look anything like one.

The man only chuckled. But Lex did not need to hear his response, as he immediately understood when the ship rose vertically into the air till it was high enough, then suddenly shot into the distance like a slingshot! He went from 0 to a 100 real quick, and then a 1000, and then probably beyond.

Fortunately, the aptly named ship did not stop as abruptly as it launched, and began slowing down only a few minutes later as it ventured into a valley. A very regal and majestic looking pagoda stood in the heart of the valley, surrounded by what seemed like an ocean of white crystals.

Lex's intuition, which had so far been silent, began acting up again. There was something in the pagoda that was extremely valuable, though that was not a surprise.

Lex only took a moment to appreciate the beauty around him once he disembarked. But he was generally an impatient man, and not one for building suspense. He stepped in.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 538: Stupid cliches

"Hey, do you know who that was?" asked one of the soldiers who saw Lex walk into the pagoda. They had been informed that the pagoda would be open to the public, so they didn't really bother to stop him. But it was only after Lex entered that it occurred to one of the soldiers that they hadn't really spread news of the pagoda yet.

Although they did have a marketing plan, it had yet to be implemented, so a lot of people should not have known about it yet. The soldiers who had originally encountered the pagoda were told not to spread the news until a deal was made with the Innkeeper. Though that order had now been lifted, too little time had passed for the news to propagate properly.

"Does it matter?" asked another soldier, who was too preoccupied with his own assignment.

The first soldier shrugged and continued with his work.

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Entering the pagoda did not feel like teleporting at all, though his intuition clearly told him he was in an entirely new area. It felt as if he just walked into another room.

The air was surprisingly fresh, though the area looked like a massive hall made from large stone blocks with no windows for ventilation. Closed glass lanterns were attached to the walls, illuminating the hall with dim yellow light. But the range of his sight seemed to be limited for he couldn't see the end of the hall as it seemed to fade into darkness.

Lex drew a parallel between his situation and the visibility of video game characters when they roamed the map. Only a certain area around them would be visible to the player, while the rest of the map would be a mystery.

He looked down and saw a thin yet prominent line drawn in the ground. Somehow, without the need to be informed, he knew that his trial would begin the moment he crossed the line. It suddenly occurred to him that he should have polished up on new techniques before entering the pagoda, but then he shrugged.

Despite his train of thought earlier, he didn't genuinely believe that he'd be able to complete the pagoda on his first try, regardless of how powerful he was. That was because the limitation sustained by the pagoda for entry was one of age, not the cultivation realm. He was sure there were others out there much stronger than him at his age, so out right firepower shouldn't be the defining factor that allowed one to reach the top of the pagoda.

But then again, maybe it was. He still didn't think it would be so straightforward, however.

There was only one way to find out.

He took a step forward and crossed the line before continuing to walk ahead. Nothing seemed to have happened, but his intuition told him otherwise. The air had been filled with some kind of sedative, though Lex did not bother trying to filter his air.

Not only was he confident in his own body's capabilities, but his intuition let him know that it was unable to affect him at all.

As he continued to walk forward, more and more gasses were mixed into the air, all with various effects. He figured that anyone with a weaker physique would suffer greatly, and even if they decided to hold their breath, it would only last until they faced some action. But there were too many ways to filter the air, so this was still not impressive enough.

But all of that changed when he saw a single figure emerge from the darkness up ahead. Lex's face paled as he saw the figure and identified what, or rather, who it was. It was himself.

The first trial in the pagoda... was to face an exact copy of himself. Lex did not need to draw assumptions as the pagoda somehow directly planted the information inside his mind, the way it had done about the line in the ground.

The Evil Lex, as he decided to call him, was completely identical to him in every calculable measure. That meant, much like himself, Evil Lex would have an outstanding intuition that would warn him about any incoming attacks, any plans Hero Lex made, how to avoid them and how to take advantage of them. He had all his techniques, which fortunately he did not update, and all his gear, which consisted of nothing but his clothes. He also had Hero Lex's boundless shamelessness, and would not feel any hesitation in defining himself as the hero and the other as evil.

As if that was not enough...

"You know we suck at attacking and are incredibly strong at defense. Why don't we have a chat instead?" said Evil Lex, with his signature evil and malevolent smile, which in no way was a result of Hero Lex projecting his hate onto him. Hero Lex did not need to reply, because he knew Evil Lex had his sixth sense as well, and could determine Hero Lex's mental state just by talking.

Hero Lex took a deep breath and said, "Let's get this over with."

He used Home sweet home to throw himself at the evil Lex and punched him right in the face. True to his completely arrogant nature, Evil Lex did not even bother moving and allowed the punch to land, confident in the knowledge that it could not harm him.

As predicted, the punch was unable to harm him, but if things were so simple, Evil Lex's expression would not have suddenly changed. Yet it was too late.

The ridiculously severe flaw in this unnecessarily common cliché, that Lex felt often ruined anime finales, was that as the original, no one was more familiar with his own weaknesses than Lex himself.

The biggest weakness Lex had was his overreliance on his intuition, and the biggest flaw his intuition suffered was that it was unable to warn of things related to systems. In the last moment before Lex's punch connected, a golden key appeared between his fingers. The key naturally was not able to break through Evil Lex's skin, and instead broke itself due to the strength of the clash.

Evil Lex disappeared and Hero Lex remained, feeling like he had overcome the most ridiculous and overused challenge. If what the pagoda had in store for him was more of this, he would be seriously disappointed.

Though, just to make sure he had Mary check if an Evil Lex showed up to the Inn. He didn't. It seemed the moment the clone or projection or whatever it was exited the pagoda, it ceased to exist.

With a snort Lex continued forward. A staircase leading to the next floor revealed itself from the darkness, allowing him to go to the next floor.

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Larry sat across Marlo in his private jet as the man shared plans of their incursion. The 'prison' where all the prisoners were being held was in India. It was far away from any settlements and hidden through the use of formations.

Larry did not know what Marlo did to get his hands on this information, but the man had a general layout of the kind of defense they had, and it honestly scared Larry a bit. There were quite a few Nascent realm guards posted, not to mention defensive formations, spirit tech and more!

But if, despite knowing all that, Marlo was confident in going, Larry decided to trust him. This was not an opportunity he would get again. Perhaps it showed a hint of desperation that he was following such a crazy plan, but he'd spent way too many years suffering because of what happened to his family.

He no longer had any hope that he would miraculously discover that they were actually alive, being held somewhere waiting for him to rescue them. He was convinced they were dead. He just wanted revenge. It would also help if the constant assassination threats against him would stop.

He played with small, metallic beads in his hands, unaware of the pressure he was exerting on them. Every time he would swipe his thumb over them, one of them would disappear while the other beads became larger, only to return to normal with the next swipe.

Such a small detail would escape most, but not Marlo. The man was extremely meticulous, especially now that he was constantly racked with pain all over his body.

But in exchange for pain, he was stuck with a new issue. His new form of cultivation depends on him continuously overcoming difficult and dangerous trials. Only by putting his life on the line would he grow stronger. Unfortunately, there were almost no such dangers left for him to face on earth.

The one exception... was the place he was about to arrive. Everyone thought that he was going to get justice for the numerous wrongs that prisoner subject earth to. Instead, he was going because there was no one left on this planet for him to pick a fight with.

A wide, maniacal grin painted his face.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 539: Resonance

The moment Lex set his first step onto the second floor a couple of things happened. First, some esoteric knowledge about how using appropriate forms while punching produced different results appeared in his head. Second, his intuition started blaring about incoming danger.

But by now Lex had become fairly used to emergencies. His reaction was quick yet smooth, and lacked the jerkiness that came with dodging an unexpected attack.

He leaned forward just enough to dodge a paper thin blade that had aimed to slice through the back of his neck. The fact that Lex felt the need to dodge meant that the blade was sharp enough to cut through his defenses.

Calmly he moved his hand forward and transitioned from leaning forward into a single-armed handstand, allowing him to look back. A strange looking creature had attacked him, and was preparing to attack again after its ambush failed. It was bipedal but with four arms, two coming out from its shoulders but two coming out from its back.

The arms attached to its shoulders were longer and had eight fingers, each with a long and sharp nail that ended at an impossibly small point. The arms coming out of the back, while shorter, had four fingers and a thumb, and each held a weapon. One held the sword with which Lex had been attacked while the other looked like some kind of gun.

The creature also had a long and thick tail dragging behind, in the shape of a lizard's tail. While the tail did not look too flexible, the sheer size of it told of the immense strength it probably had.

Not that it mattered. Lex had been wanting to try something for a while now, and this was the perfect opportunity. Using his left eye, he used Evisceration. His left eye was special, he already knew that. Evisceration was an incredibly strong soul based attack, he also knew that. What he didn't know is if the result would be greater than expected if he combined the two.

The result... uhh, he didn't know how to gauge the result. Despite his promotion, the difficulty of using Evisceration had not reduced. In fact, the reason he avoided using it frequently was because he feared hurting himself in the process. Even now, despite his growth, he wasn't completely confident in his perfect implementation of it.

Yet he did not know if he was just better than he assumed, or it was the result of using his left eye, but he did not get hurt. Other than that, nothing much seemed to change. The strange creature directly died as a result of his attack and fell forward. Perhaps he would need to find a creature capable of surviving his attack to determine if there was a difference.

That might be more difficult than it seemed, for soul attacks were always extremely lethal.

Lex allowed his body to fall backwards, but quickly yet elegantly moved his feet, making it seem as if he had completed a cartwheel. It just so happened, his move had allowed him to dodge a projectile.

Though he didn't want to admit it, the quick and easy defeat of his own clone had given him certain insight into his own weakness. Though the projectile was weaker than the blade and would not have

broken through Lex's defense, there was no real reason to allow contact. Who said he should blindly rely on his defense just because it was strong? Instead, the protective measures he took needed to encapsulate multiple different strategies.

His sharp intuition and perfect control of his body allowed him to dodge most attacks, suddenly creating a new layer of difficulty his attackers needed to overcome.

This might seem like it was no different from what he did earlier, since he was always dodging attacks in his previous fights as well, but there was a fundamental difference. Earlier he dodged because all his opponents were usually stronger than him, and capable of harming him to some degree. But in the instances where he could get away with it, he took full advantage of his defense. It was the difference between strategically allowing an attack to land on his body, and allowing an attack to land because he was too lazy to dodge a weak attack.

He created a small challenge for himself in addition to anything the pagoda might throw at him. He decided to see how many floors he could overcome without allowing a single rip in his clothes. After all, unlike him, they had no substantial defense at all.

Lex walked forward, only glancing at his enemy long enough to kill him with a shot of evisceration.

The speed at which he walked seemed completely ordinary, yet each and every move he performed allowed him to dodge an enemy attack which had started increasing. He seemed completely at ease as countless blades fell in his path and endless bullets chased him. Of course, he did not walk in a straight line, as that would be too predictable.

Instead, it seemed like he was slowly warming up for a dance. There was a rhythm that his body adopted that seemed to resonate with some unseen force. He moved his head to dodge a close shave, yet if someone saw him from a distance, it would seem he was bobbing his head to a song.

All the while, the number of enemies around him kept increasing, as well as bodies. He started picking up speed, but the elegance of his moves did not diminish in the slightest and soon it was like he was on a stage giving a performance.

For some reason, an image flashed in his mind of a ballet performance he saw long ago during the Midnight Games. But the image disappeared just as quickly as it came, and Lex did not really think about

why he suddenly recalled it. Instead, as he made his way through this trial, and his gaze that heralded death washed over his enemies, Lex realized something else.

Although the resonance was not reaching a point significant enough to produce a result yet, whatever unseen force his body was connecting to reminded him of the effect of array characters.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 540: Destinys chosen

Even as Lex was experiencing something new, he retained perfect control of his thoughts. He did not allow himself to become too excited, and calmly analyzed the situation.

Although it may not have seemed like it, Lex's progress with arrays was phenomenal. Not only was he memorizing more and more arrays that could be used in various circumstances, he was further familiarizing himself with the new and unique way he designed to form arrays.

He had not had too much of an opportunity to show off what he learned, but just the fact that he could defeat Nascent realm cultivators before his rise in cultivation realm should have been an indication of just how much more he could do with arrays.

Although arrays themselves technically had nothing to do with cultivation realm, as the strength of an array came solely from the characters used and the array itself, there was more to it than that. A greater cultivation realm allowed him more energy to power an inherently larger array than he could have before, not to mention how the boost in his mental faculties allowed him to hold on to larger arrays in his mind as well. The speed at which he could create arrays to match his circumstances also gained a massive boost.

An easy way to understand it was an oversimplified comparison. Regardless of the physical strength of a person, the amount of damage a bullet could do would stay the same. The fact that Lex had grown stronger did not change how much damage the bullet could do. The fact that Lex could now aim much faster, shoot with much more accuracy and probably wield a 100 guns at the same time with the same precision due to his spirit sense also did not inherently change the destructive capabilities of the bullet. It just enhanced Lex's own capacity to cause much more damage.

But even setting all that over simplification aside, the matter at hand was that Lex was not using any arrays! So why then did he feel like he was experiencing something similar. The power of an array came

not from the user, but from the universe at large. Was he in some way resonating with the universe the way array characters did? Was that the effect of new, unknown affinity?

Before he could come to an answer, all the enemies were dead. This was... interesting. Lex walked forward until he encountered another staircase and proceeded to climb to the next floor. His mind conjured up countless possibilities for what the actual answer was.

The ring given to him by John that actually carried a compiled manual for arrays was something he consulted often, either to further his studies or provide him with answers. A part of his mind began to peruse the ring, searching for what exactly about the characters caused their relevant effects.

He also wondered if the reason why the resonance he experienced didn't produce a result was because it was too weak, or because it was lacking in something else.

The moment he stepped onto the third floor, despite all the calmness and coolness he displayed earlier, he stumbled. The new information that entered his mind... was a guide on how to use soul energy to enhance the effects of dances!

As ridiculous as that sounded, at least now he could determine what kind of rewards each floor would give him. He would receive information about how to enhance one of the techniques or abilities displayed in overcoming the previous floor.

The first floor pitted him against a single enemy. The second floor put him against an entire host of enemies with a weapon strong enough to hurt him, though they were still too weak. Regardless of the fact that they were both easy to overcome for Lex, there was an exponential increase in difficulty between the floors. This theory was only reinforced once he stepped onto the third floor.

This time, a massive robot stood in front of him, staring at him with red glowing eyes. It had the shape of a spider, with wings and what looked like laser turrets.

Lex had a suspicion, so he tried it out and... yes, evisceration did not work on the robot because it had no soul! Even his left eye could do nothing about that. Lex shrugged. He was still not intimidated. Although he had no other good attacking techniques, as a user of Regal Embrace, it was long destined it would be so. The cultivation technique actively made it difficult for him to learn offensive techniques. Only arrays remained unaffected by the influence of his technique, so that's what he'd use.

One moment they both stood still, but the next a fierce battle erupted!

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As ever, his signature six swords hovered in the air behind Alexander. But for once they did not move to attack the horde of insectoids that attacked him, and retained their place in the sky. Instead, this time Alexander took to solving things up close and personal.

Like a barbarian, he hurled himself into the endless wave of enemies, but their numbers did nothing to slow him. His exosuit suffered no harm no matter how much damage it soaked up and continued to strengthen his each and every action.

It did not matter what kind of enemy came in front of him. Whether they had hard shells or indestructible carapace mattered little, for what guided his herculean strength were a carefully selected and perfectly implemented selection of techniques.

One of Alexander's greatest strengths was always his masterful use of various techniques, but that had gone to a whole new level now. He changed techniques faster than anyone could understand, moving from one to another with ease and efficiency that was almost machine-like.

His whole life, he'd had many advantages that others lacked. He'd been helped and guided by the best. He'd had opportunities that most could not even imagine. But none of that made him feel like he was borrowing the strength of others, or that he hadn't earned his strength.

Though he had been trained by many, he was the one who took what others gave and turned into something so much greater.

He didn't need destiny to choose him, or pity his weakness. He would carve out his path himself.