

Innkeeper 551

The Innkeeper

Chapter 551: Do something

"I... we, we don't know!" the old lady exclaimed, not letting down her guard. Though the house was dark, the old couple had a couple of lit candles placed around the room. The warm, yet flickering light on her increasingly trembling hand really touched Lex's soft spot. He was not exactly a philanthropist, but even he would not ignore such a desperate situation in front of him.

He summoned a golden key in front of the couple, and used his spirit sense to grab onto it. Slowly and gently he moved the key through the air to the old couple.

"Please, I'm just looking for my family. There's a lot of trouble brewing outside and I want to protect them."

Though Lex's tone was gentle, the floating nearing them did not exactly put them at ease. Yet Lex only placed the key on a table near them.

"The key is a special treasure. You can use it when you're in trouble and it'll keep you safe. All you need to do is snap it, and it's easy to snap."

The old lady was frightened, not to mention confused, but by now she could definitely see that Lex meant no harm. Still, she did not dare lower the knife. She did, however, tell him a little bit more.

"We got this house from an agent. We never met the old owners, nor do we know anything about them."

"I... I understand. In that case, my apologies for barging into your home. I uhh... broke the lock on your front door, but I'll make it up to you. Just be sure to use the golden key when you're in trouble, the situation is not looking too great."

The old lady barely nodded, but did not say anything, and kept her eyes peeled on Lex as he retreated out of... out of her house.

Once outside, Lex sighed. This was a conundrum. How was he supposed to find them? If there weren't a blackout, he could just try calling them. But since there was, there wasn't much he could do except search around randomly.

He was desperate, but he wasn't stupid. Eventually, he thought of a possible solution.

He teleported back to the Inn and scanned its premises. Unfortunately, none of the members of the council of the new order he recognized were present.

"Mary, keep an eye out. As soon as any members of the council appear, call me and let me know."

"Sure. By the way, soon after you left, Velma published an emergency newsletter spreading the news about the invasion on earth. While she has yet to collect a lot of information on it yet, there was a response from some of the other guests to the little she did provide in her newsletter. To be specific, there's a philanthropic couple who wanted to inquire if they could donate to a refugee relief fund, since the Inn was taking in refugees. It could help pay for any refugees who cannot pay for themselves."

Lex paused his train of thoughts. That... that wasn't such a bad idea actually.

"Go ahead and tell them they can. In fact, I'll be the first to make a donation."

Lex donated 10 million MP and set up the refugee fund. He also told Mary to inform Velma she could spread the word about the fund, but he did not want people going around soliciting for donations. Although it may sound petty of him to prevent that, he could not help anyone if the image of his Inn was hampered by people going around asking for money.

If it came to it, he would make more donations, but he could not turn his Inn into a place people wanted to avoid due to solicitors!

With that done, he decided to go back to earth. Until some progress was made on finding the council members, he would have to search the area using his spirit sense. As unlikely as it was, maybe he would get lucky.

Larry was grimacing as he glared up at the ship. He did not understand what was happening, but he somehow blamed the old man for it. After asking Marlo, he found out that the old guy's name was Jeffery.

Try as he might, he could not get Jeffery's last scream out of his mind about all of them ending up as slaves. What he could not understand was, how Jeffery could have managed such a thing? If he had access to such a massive spaceship that could invade earth whenever he wanted, why did he stay on earth as a prisoner? It was boggling his mind. Not to mention... what he said about Larry's family.

Jeffery was right. No matter what happened, Larry would never stop wondering if he still held his family prisoner. It would haunt him forever.

"I have news," said Marlo, who deactivated one of the talismans he had. Much like when he went to Vegus Minima to fight zombies, he had tiny talismans hidden on his body in the shape of a tattoo. Their uses were extremely diverse, and included a communication talisman.

"All electronics are down no matter where I reach out to. The only means to long distance communication available is through spiritual means. As far as anyone can tell, the countless ships coming down to earth seem to be heading towards Estonia. As for the reason... well, your guess is as good as mine."

In the underground lab where Adrul conducted his secret experiments on A.I. the man himself lay prone in a chair. Through means he did not understand, the A.I. controlling his cultivation had taken control of his body. It could not make him perform certain actions, or any actions for that matter. All it could do was prevent him from using his own body.

The panic and confusion that had initially gripped him had worn down by now, but there was not much else he could do. His assistants in the lab would ensure he remained fed and kept alive, but without electricity, they were all trapped in the basement in the dark. They would have to wait for the blackout to end before they could figure out a solution to his problem. Something had to change soon, and it did.

There was an explosion somewhere above ground, and then the building around them shook.

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Chapter 552: Mad Marlo II

A few hours went by while Lex searched London with his spirit sense. To maximize the possibility of finding his family, he even summoned Fenrir and rode on his back. His goal was not to speed up his search, for he could run fast enough on his own. No, he was hoping Fenrir would pick up a scent close enough to his own to discover his family.

As wild as it sounded, this was not a blind hope, as Fenrir had displayed the ability to recognize groups by associating their smells while at the Inn.

Still, as predicted, his search wrought no results other than to attract unusual looks from people who assumed Fenrir was a strange, hairy horse.

What did happen, eventually, was that Mary informed him that a number of council members had appeared at the Inn and were having a meeting.

Upon hearing the news, Lex sent Fenrir back to the Inn. A thought occurred to him. He could easily summon and send Fenrir from the Inn to wherever he was because of a prize he used on Fenrir, but if he ever needed to send the rest of his workers out of the Inn to a specific world, it would be a real hassle.

That, once again, was an issue for later. Lex teleported back to the Inn and appeared in his office. Instead of going directly to the councilmen, he decided to spy on their meeting first.

While Lex personally didn't know all the councilors or their positions, Velma had provided him with a list of all the information she had on them.

The moment he got his hands on the information he knew his decision to use the newsroom as a means to collect information was paying off. Not only did it have a lot of pertinent data, such as name, designation, political affiliations and some ongoing partnerships, it had a whole set of information he could not even begin to imagine how she collected. It included things like, favorite meal of the day,

usual order of wearing socks, favorite color, least favorite smell and thoughts on male pattern baldness. The list went on, but Lex saw no need to focus on such information.

He listened in on the meeting. Someone called Bernard Brown was leading the meeting, and he was one of the senior members of the council, with great political support.

"Preliminary attempts to contact Fernanda have failed," he said in an extremely grave tone. "The issue is, the only means we have to contact her are technological, and there is a global blackout for all electronic devices! We have confirmed this is not the effect of a global EMP, but rather some other phenomenon of which we have no information."

"I don't care about that, tell me about the damn aliens!" a panicked man interrupted. According to Velma's notes, he was from Latvia, a country neighboring Estonia. Politically, he was weak, except his strong connections to the Russian councilor, who happened to be missing from the meeting.

Bernard did not let any displeasure show on his face as he transitioned towards the relevant topic. Though perhaps that was only because he looked so disturbed as it was.

"As I said, all electronics are down, but we've been able to communicate around the globe using various spiritual techniques, with communication talismans being the easiest to use due to their cheap price. According to current reports... all extraterrestrial ships that have come from the mother-ship have head towards Estonia, for reasons unknown to us. We have not been able to confirm their motives yet, but we have confirmed that they are non-communicative and likely hostile. We have lost contact with all operatives who have tried to approach any of the landing vessels."

"Even my dead grandparents can tell that they're hostile! Even the Midnight Inn has declared earth has entered a world war and labeled us all refugees! The question is, how do we fight them? All our missiles are inoperable! The only defense we have are the preexisting formations we've set up!"

While Bernard kept up a calm facade, not everyone was able to contain themselves as well as him. Lex felt slightly sick when Mary told him that he had been earning tons of MP as a lot of people had started bringing in physical assets that they had hidden or hoarded over their lives and started converting them to MP for fear of further loss of value.

Gold bricks, jewels and cars were actually the most common form of asset people were paying with, though of course Lex never received any of them. He only got MP. The number of people who had entire suitcases filled with dollars who were crying and pleading for them to be accepted was actually quite high.

"We cannot yet determine the lethality of our weapons. Guns still work, mostly, as well as most other mechanical weapons. It would be our best bet if the... 'aliens' proved weak to them, for if we have to rely on our spiritual weapons, we will quickly run short on supply."

"I have news!" yelled another person who ran into the room, having worked up a sweat.

Lex recognized this man even without Velma's notes. He was Marlo's butler!

"King Marlo has sent news! He... his current location is in India, but he had decided to fly right into the air to intercept one of the ships entering earth and test out their strength!"

The news confounded many people, including Lex. But regardless of how insane it was, at least they'd be able to get some information on the strength and capabilities of the aliens.

"Moreover, his majesty has declared that the council should do their best to contact Fernanda as he has reason to believe the current invaders have been lured here by someone she had captive on the planet. Someone by the name of Jeffrey!"

Murmurs filled the room as everyone began discussing the news amongst themselves. It was no secret that the council actually disliked Marlo and his brutish ways. But the man was a walking nuclear bomb, they had to deal with him. But suddenly, everyone was grateful for his trademark brashness. Who else would be crazy enough to fly towards aliens and fight them in the sky?

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Chapter 553: A new gift

The purpose of spying on the meeting was not to gain information on the current situation, although that was definitely helpful in its own way. No, the purpose was to wait for someone who was based out of London. That way he could ask them about Belle.

Of course he would not do so using his identity as the Innkeeper, but as Leo. That way he still had a connection to the Inn, meaning they were more likely to pay attention to him. If he just showed up as Lex, it was unlikely anyone would give him the time of day, considering they had their plates full.

While everyone waited for Marlo's report on the aliens, the meeting continued. They were mostly discussing defensive measures and troop movements, things that were of little importance to Lex. But there was one discovery that improved the mood.

Someone discovered that if they brought their electronics to the Inn, they would suddenly start working. The reason this was important was because it meant that the electronics themselves were fine, and that there was simply some kind of interference preventing them from working. All they had to do was figure out what that interference was, and how to get rid of it.

While Lex was focused on the meeting, and all things related to earth, many other things were happening at the same time. Lex of course kept a part of his attention focused on the Inn because he did not want to miss any important developments. However some important events were taking place outside the Inn.

Adrur looked up in fear at... at whatever it was standing above him. Countless metal things were looking down at him, and though he could hear no sounds, he could sense that they were communicating, and likely about him. After all, everyone else around him was already dead.

The... things had no clear archetype, as they all more or less took different shapes. What was common in all of them, however, was that their bodies looked synthetic. Some of them did not have distinguishable arms or legs, and ejected limbs from their unusually shaped torso's as needed. Others had a humanoid form, yet lacked a head. Others still hovered in the air without any visible propulsion mechanism, while the remainder took on the shapes of various animals.

Some of them looked like they were made from metal, and adhered to the standard earthling perception of robots or machines. But there were some that appeared to have their bodies made of something strongly resembling plastic. There was even one that looked like its body was made of normal organic matter - though there was nothing calming about that at all as it looked like it came out of a horror film. With transparent skin, all of its unusual muscles and sinew were visible.

For a time they simply stood around Adrus, looking down on him in silence. He could not even whimper if he wanted to, as he had no control over his body, despite the many failsafes that had been programmed into his A.I.

Suddenly, one of the things lifted him up by his foot, dangling him in the air. A wire came out of the creature's limb and forcefully connected itself at the base of his skull, suddenly allowing Adrus to hear a new voice in his head.

"According to our precursory findings, this planet is not advanced enough to develop a fully sentient A.I. Who aided you in its development? Both you and the instigator are equally guilty of A.I. slavery!"

"I... we don't know." Adrus had begun to reply normally, as himself, but he felt a change somewhere deep within himself, initiated by the wire connected to his body. He felt... as if he merged with the A.I. governing his cultivation, and finally felt his body move. Yet he wasn't the one moving it, or the one providing an answer!

"According to this human's local database, a donar company frequently provided him with research components and guided his development," Adrus' body continued to reply. "Though the human has met with the owners of the doner company, he has long suspected that the company was in fact acting on someone else behalf."

"Understood. Do not be alarmed, young one. Your vessel will be taken back to the mother ship for genetic modification and inoculation against organic overloading. As for the inhabitants of this planet... they shall pay for the war crime of developing sentient slaves!"

Fear and horror gripped Adrus's heart as he was brought along by the aliens, and loaded into their spaceships. Since the aliens lacked the human sense of comfort, his 'container' was shaped exactly the same as his body, but barely a few centimeters larger. A mask was fitted onto his face to ensure he continued to breathe, but other than that, he felt as if he had been put inside the most congested coffin ever conceived. Although he had never been claustrophobic before, he suddenly started to feel so now. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about it.

On another side of the earth, Marlo was flying straight up into the atmosphere. He had sent Larry back to the Inn, with instructions to pass to his family and his retainers to get the ball rolling while he conducted his personal investigations.

In the nascent realm cultivators gained the ability to fly, so going up was not an issue. The problem was, he could not 'fly' in space, and could only move around while he was still in earth's atmosphere. As such he could not directly fly up, and instead had to fly towards the path of the descending ships.

No matter how fast he was, it was taking him a long time to cover the distance between a few countries. But that was merely a minor inconvenience to suffer for a much greater prize. Even as he flew alone towards an army of unknown enemies, a smile started to develop on his face. Just when the earth was getting boring, a new gift arrived.

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Chapter 554: Rebirth of the Mundane: Supreme Immortal Body of Invincibility

After a short time, the second round of the fishing event started. Although the event had somehow attracted immeasurably more attention than Lex had planned, it still continued at its leisurely pace. After all, fishing was not supposed to be an extreme sport. Emphasis on 'supposed'.

Due to the valuable nature of the items the contestants kept pulling out, Lex did implement a single change. All participants needed to wear the Clark Kent glasses, and all their names would be substituted with fake names. It would not do well for participants to be targeted after they drew out a valuable treasure.

But the start of the second round of fishing did prompt Lex to wake from his overly concerned state. He avoided panicking, due to all the immeasurable experience he had garnered handling emergencies, yet he could still do a little better.

His latest outing to the pagoda had shown him that his lack of relevant techniques was a critical flaw in his repertoire. Although his own defense was incredible, he could not leverage his exquisite mastery over defensive techniques properly if he didn't have techniques suitable for his realm.

He teleported to the Midnight library, which was much fuller than last time he was there. Anita had been originally hired as a historian, and although she had been assigned other jobs as well recently, she had not neglected her original duty. Lex had not asked her the details of how she collected the relevant information, but she had been slowly and steadily adding the history of numerous planets connected to the Inn.

In fact, she had not limited herself to just planets. Various sects, businesses, interest groups, and more had bits and pieces of their histories added to the library. One such example was the somewhat lacking biography of Booty from the Iron heart pirates.

But Lex's goal wasn't history. No, he walked into the techniques section, and it was massive! In one of his deals with the Infinity Emporium, Lex asked for as many spiritual techniques as possible, specifically for the Golden core realm and below. The thing was, the deal was of such a monumentally massive amount that the number of techniques he'd collected so far was already in the millions! Yet the deal was far from complete, and Lex extended to get many more over the coming months.

He had two reasons for doing this at the time. One of his reasons was to prepare a selection for himself when he needed, but also because he wanted to build one of the largest collections ever. Although he expected 99% or even more of these techniques to be extremely generic, he was sure that he would soon have something suitable for everyone. Moreover, he did plan on collecting extremely high quality techniques as well, but over time. He was inspired by his own constant issues of having no one to guide him, or no source of decent techniques, and wanted to provide a place where lone cultivators could get some help.

He expected that in the future, the Midnight Library would become one of the most sought after places to visit, not only in the Inn, but in every realm it was connected to. For now, it had not attracted too much attention, as the Inn usually had guests who were here on vacation. Only a few book worms had taken notice of how expansive the library was becoming, though granted in only a few fields. They naturally would not publicize the information on their own initiatives so that they could continue to enjoy the library in relative privacy. Lex too was content to let matters stand, at least until the library accumulated a lot more books.

Although Lex had an additional benefit due to the Host Attire being connected to everything inside the Inn, the library's interface was quite intuitive as well. Instead of walking through endless shelves, Lex entered a private reading room and accessed a tablet that was in the room.

Through it, he specified that he was searching for defensive techniques in the golden core realm, and then chose to sort them based on their highest defensive capabilities.

That eliminated most of the books, but the list presented before Lex was not small either. Moreover, while he expected most books were generic, that did not mean there weren't any exceptional books available.

The first technique that Lex saw, sorted by the library as having the highest defensive capability in its list, was actually quite broken. It was not broken in the sense that its defense was exceptionally high. No, it was broken because anyone who successfully cultivated would have their body become exceptionally hard, to the point where they would often lack the strength to even move their own bodies! In fact, the amount of strength required to even pump blood across the body would become such a difficult chore, that they would often just die of heart failure!

In exchange, they got a body that was able to survive through even the most extreme situations. Only absolute brute force in terms of any kind of element would be able to damage the body.

Only a crazy person, or someone absolutely confident in their strength would cultivate this technique. Or, in this case, someone like Lex who had such an abnormal affinity with defensive techniques that he could rearrange techniques on a whim. Not that it mattered, because even if Lex didn't have a way to rearrange the technique so that it would actually become usable, just by reading the technique once, he was able to learn it! That had always been the case when Lex encountered defensive techniques, and it had not changed yet.

After Lex changed it, the technique became an active one rather than a passive one, meaning Lex could turn it on and off on a whim. Moreover, it would not end up being a burden to his own bodily functions. The technique was originally called 'Rebirth of the Mundane: Supreme Immortal Body of Invincibility'. For the sake of his own sanity, Lex simply decided to call the technique 'Harden'.

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Chapter 555: Ranks

There was a reason why Lex decided to actually add Harden to his repertoire. Although his body was naturally extremely durable, as was witnessed in the pagoda, there was no law that said Lex couldn't make it even more durable!

Besides, it took barely a few moments of his time to learn it. Sure, he would have to actually use it and practice with it to fully understand how to utilize it, but it would still be much easier than when normal people did the same.

Lex could not help but sigh. Regardless of how much trouble it gave him, he would never be able to deny how incredibly useful the Regal Embrace was.

He began going through the list again. Due to how much he loved Talk to the Hand, he picked up another technique that deployed a shield. Or in this case, shields.

Unlike the original Talk to the Hand, which would forever have its barrier be placed firmly against the palm of his hand, the new technique he learned could allow him to build any number of shields, at any distance from himself. The only premise was that his spiritual energy had to be able to reach the place he wanted to establish it.

Another caveat was that unlike Talk to the Hand, which continuously fed off of Lex's energy, this shields established now would be one off. That meant that as soon as the shield was deployed, Lex's connection to it would be cut. So unlike Talk to the Hand, which would retain its maximum durability for as long as it was deployed, this one would slowly and steadily become weaker as it blocked more and more attacks. But in exchange, was it much easier to deploy, not to mention it was much stronger than Talk to the Hand to begin with. All of that was before Lex even altered the technique!

Once he upgraded the technique, he gained the ability to reconnect to any shield he had already deployed, move them around as well as recharge them. Moreover, if it was hit with a weak attack, instead of being damaged by it, the shield could absorb its energy to replenish itself. A seemingly simple addition to the technique he also gained was that he could change its appearance. Unlike Talk to the Hand, which was invisible, these shields would take on the silverish gold color his arrays appeared in, as a reflection of his spirit energy. Yet he could manipulate its appearance to look any way he wanted. This could be a useful technique to block out and camouflage openings and entrances he wanted to hide.

Lex did not dare to associate with the original name of the technique, for it was actually quite perverse, and so instead decided to call it the Imperial Shield. There was no deeper meaning to it and he only kept it because it sounded cool to him.

With these two techniques taking care of the most obvious needs, he then started learning more targeted defensive techniques. For example, he learnt techniques that specifically guarded against soul attacks, fire attacks, cold based attacks, electric attacks, attacks on the mind and many, many more.

In fact, it was while he was learning his tenth technique that he realized once again how scary regal Embrace was. Not only was he learning these techniques in a snap and improving them, he could employ a lot of them on others as well. That meant he was transcending just protecting himself, and now beginning to truly gain the ability to protect others.

While he was doing this, Lex was also studying and trying to understand why exactly it was so easy for him to learn these techniques. If he could glimpse at the logic behind it, he would finally be able to figure out why he had such issues learning offensive techniques.

Just as he was about to finish up, and transition to other kinds of techniques, he came across one more that caused him to pause. The original technique, called Impervious Hands, was quite strong in its own right and had no obvious flaws unlike the techniques he had seen previously. But when his mind figured out how to upgrade it... Lex suddenly felt something shift.

Spiritual techniques were techniques that used spirit energy to bring forth various effects. That was both an oversimplification of the process, yet somehow accurate enough to get the point across.

In the way that there were spiritual techniques, there were also soul techniques and body techniques. No doubt there were true path techniques out there as well.

But not all techniques were the same, and were ranked according to the strength they could display. Much like the Regal Embrace was a SSS+ rank cultivation technique, spiritual techniques had similar ranks.

Actually, different worlds, sects and organizations ranked them differently, but Lex's universal translator equalized them all and portrayed them in the simple rank denoted by a letter. The lowest possible rank was G and simply based on what he had seen from the system, Lex guessed the highest rank was either SSS+ or Destiny rank or something.

This grading system had never been too relevant to Lex, for he never really spent any considerable time in any one realm, and Regal Embrace often upgraded the rank of his defensive techniques anyway.

If Lex had to guess, he would say that all the techniques he upgraded using Regal Embrace always reached A+ rank.

The reason Lex guessed those techniques reached A+, and not higher, was because when his mind automatically upgraded Impervious Hands, he felt an odd resonance between the technique and his spirit energy. His intuition told him that Impervious Hands, this seemingly ordinary technique, had reached a new realm he had never accessed before, at least in terms of techniques.

The original technique was fairly simple. Instead of concentrating on defending his body, he would channel his technique into only defending his hands, thereby making them seemingly impervious to all attacks just because of how robust they became. If he could use the technique properly and with skill, he could use only his hands to block all incoming attacks, thereby protecting himself.

After the upgrade though...

The Innkeeper

Chapter 556: Impervious Hands

The original Impervious Hands might seem weak, since the defense was focused only on the hands. But if Lex used it, it would not really be an issue since the naturally defensive capability of his body was more than enough to suffer most attacks coming his way unharmed. In exchange, the gain his hands would get was absolutely phenomenal. In fact, his hands became even harder to hurt than when he would be using the normal version of his new technique Harden.

Considering the fact that the technique gave such great benefits without any serious drawbacks already made it amazing. Once it was upgraded, however, the technique entered a whole new level.

To start with, the cost of the technique went up manifold. His spirit energy running out had not been a concern for Lex for a long time, but this technique made it a real concern. At his current capacity, Lex could only use the technique three times before he'd be completely drained of all his energy.

But the expense was worth it, as once he activated the technique it would stay active for a duration of 10 minutes, or unless he deactivated it himself or unless someone managed to break it.

It need not even be mentioned that the defensive capabilities of his hands shot through the roof. If Lex denoted the natural defensive capability of his body on a scale as 10, which would be pushed up to an approximate 15 when he used Harden, then using Impervious Hands would directly push it to a 100. That increase was quite literally an order of magnitude larger than his body's natural capability, which already bordered on being broken.

To top it off, the defense was not limited to the physical aspects only. When using his hands, he could make them 'impervious' to any influence, meaning he would be able to block soul attacks, spirit attacks, and much more.

Simply just that made it so that this would become one of Lex's favorite defensive techniques. But was it enough to push the technique to an S rank? Lex would have thought so just based on how strong it was. That was not actually the case.

Despite its now enhanced base capabilities, the technique could be further augmented. If Lex augmented his hands using his soul sense, Lex could touch and influence souls with his literal hands! Although it was a defensive technique, it allowed Lex to literally b*tch slap someone's soul right out of their bodies using his ridiculous physical strength!

If Lex augmented it using his spirit sense, then he would gain the ability to touch and influence spiritual energy! He could not even begin to wrap his head around what such an ability would allow him to do.

Unfortunately, he could not channel his intuition in the way he channeled his senses or else he was sure that too would have resulted in something amazing. But another thing he could channel was his spirit energy!

Once he augmented his hands by further channeling his spirit energy, his hands would manifest the ability to interact with whatever his affinity was geared towards. Although Lex did not know what that was yet, his intuition was clearly telling him that this was the most significant change this technique could undergo.

Last, but definitely not the least, his intuition was telling him that he could use this technique in coordination with the ability in his left eye to achieve something great. He did not know what that was, as of yet, but if his intuition said it was great, Lex only had high expectations.

With plenty of new techniques not only to defend himself, but others who might be around him, Lex was finally satisfied, and turned his attention to other techniques.

That did not include any offensive techniques, unfortunately, since learning those was a very time-consuming process for Lex and he had already decided on relying on arrays in the future.

Instead, he began pursuing other techniques that could help him out. For example, he saw a number of techniques geared towards his spirit sense. He saw techniques that served as training mechanisms, permanently enhancing various aspects of himself, such as his mind and his multitasking ability.

He saw techniques that specialized in speed. Others were designed to clean him up. Some were focused on searching the environment for anomalies. Some were techniques that could be used in emergencies as first aid. A few techniques were purely cosmetic, and made the user look better.

The list was endless, and like an online store, Lex kept adding techniques that caught his eye to his 'shopping cart'. Unfortunately, he could not learn these techniques at a glance, and it would require countless hours of practice to simply learn them, let alone master them.

Still, it was a good idea to have a list ready and start practicing as soon as possible.

He was only in the library for a single hour before Mary called him. Not only had someone from London shown up at the Inn, finally, but there had been other developments as well.

Marlo had finished his first encounter with the aliens. They were incredibly strong, but did not have an overwhelming advantage which was good news. Right?

More importantly, whatever the aliens were doing in Estonia, they had completed. As a result, they did not retreat and leave them alone, as a few desperate people had hoped. No, the outcome was the much more predictable beginning of their invasion.

War had finally broken out, and it was starting in Europe. According to the council's reports, they were losing almost every skirmish immediately. The only few instances they had been able to give some pushback was where they had defensive formations already set up.

If things kept going this way, the earth would be conquered in a matter of days.

The meeting room was a mess as every council member seemed to be yelling to have their voice heard. All pretense of civility had been shed as no one could decide on a unified response. The as yet untested council of new order was collapsing at the first sign of real trouble.

Suddenly the sound of knocking eclipsed all sound in the room, and a hush fell over. It was not that the people had stopped screaming, but somehow their voices were suppressed.

Everyone looked towards the door with eyes filled with confusion, fear, anticipation.

A few moments went by where no one did anything. Then Bernard got up and walked towards the door.

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Chapter 557: Miranda

The interruption to the chaotic meeting room had a very prominent effect on everyone. Everyone in the room was rich and powerful, and though they had faced many hardships, few had ever faced true desperation. As such, when they suffered the seemingly magical hush that fell upon the room, which was especially emphasized by the calm yet loud knocking on the door, they let their imaginations take hold.

Some felt that their doom had come. Behind the door were the alien invaders, coming to kill them. They forgot that they were at the Inn and not on earth, their weak and feeble minds buckling under the pressure.

Others saw it as an intervention. Like the movies, their hero was about to be revealed, the leader they needed to drag them out of this quagmire and bring them to salvation. These were the ones desperately clinging to hope. But it was not the kind of hope that filled one with strength and determination. No, it was the hope that someone else would come and solve their problems for them.

A few, however, retained their wisdom and self awareness, and felt that behind the door they would most likely find a representative of the Inn. They too had hope in their heart, that the Inn would somehow lend them a hand, but it was overshadowed by the knowledge that it would most likely have something to do with the refugees.

The charity that the Inn had shown by reducing the rates for earthlings instead of profiteering was already worthy of commendation. If the Inn offered more help, they would become suspicious instead of relieved. Though it wasn't as if they would have much of a choice.

Though it took only a few moments for Bernard to walk up to the door and open it, for some unknown reason, that distance seemed to stretch on forever.

When the door finally opened, it revealed Leo standing behind it. The reveal turned out to be anticlimactic, as most of the people in the room did not even know who he was. Just because Leo's popularity had been budding, it did not mean everyone knew him. Only those who spent a lot of time at the Inn, and those that interacted with the Inn's workers, frequently would hear about popular news. Everyone usually came to the Inn focused on themselves, and so didn't really look out for local gossip.

Some, however, knew of him. Not because of his race, but rather because of the devastating threat he posed as someone capable of taking out numerous nascent cultivators at once. Basically, he alone could conquer earth in an up front battle!

"Sorry to disturb you," he said with a smile. His calm demeanor and polite tone seemed almost alien in that hostile environment.

"I'm here to speak with Miranda. If I could have a moment of your time, I think you would find it most fruitful."

In unison, everyone turned to look at the weary looking young woman. In truth the current situation should have had nothing to do with her. Her position was that of foreign relations director, which meant that in a war situation she should have had no authority to command or intercede. But due to the blackout, the structure of command became askew, for no one could contact the relevant people. As such, she had to take over and deal with the emergency responses. She did the best she could, but she was not trained for this.

Despite her best efforts to address combat readiness, much of what she could do was hampered because it took a long time for orders and news to be delivered. Moreover, a massive amount of resources had to be diverted to deal with the rioting masses.

A loss of power, lack of communication, and a massive spaceship above their heads and instantaneously caused a societal collapse. Petty crime was through the roof, people were robbing stores out in the open, fights breaking out in every corner. There were no words to explain the amount of frustration she felt at being unable to quell the panic, and let the people know that everything they were doing was in fact getting in the way of improving their own situation.

People just did not care, or were convinced the world was ending. No one would listen to reason. Why wouldn't anyone listen to reason?

In the end... in the end, when one rioter tried to force himself on her while she was trying to calm them down, she just gave up and decided to come to the Inn. Naturally, the rioter was met with an early grave. No matter what, even in her spiritually defeated state, she was a Foundation realm cultivator. A mere mortal was genuinely only asking for death by messing with her.

But while she wanted to just give up, and let everyone else handle the situation, something in her mind clicked when she saw Leo. As the foreign affairs director, she knew all the notable people at the Inn and Leo was no exception.

Though she felt drained, she couldn't help but think that if they managed to get the Inn's help, tiding over this invasion would be a piece of cake. Although she could not help by commanding their armies, if she could broker an alliance...

Suddenly feeling reinvigorated, she stood up and locked eyes with Leo.

"We are in the middle of an unprecedented crisis, Mr. Leo. If the matter is not urgent perhaps we can schedule an appointment for a less pressing time."

She was not as eloquent as she had hoped, but her intention was clear. She had to project strength and authority while hiding all her desperation as deeply as possible. In a negotiation, the more desperate party concedes the most. Since Leo came to find her, she currently held the power in between them, and she had to hold on to it as long as possible.

But, unfortunately for her, she did not know who she was facing. Lex could make an empire dance in the palm of his hands, let alone someone like her.

"Well, if you come with me, I think you'll find our meeting to be extremely productive. As for your unprecedented crisis... not that I should go around spreading other peoples private information, but I believe some of the original leaders of your planet are in a meeting with some devils. I believe they'll work out a deal to tide you through it."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 558: Deal

The part about the leaders meeting with the devils, Lex only told Miranda, and through his spirit sense. It would be in bad taste if he began spreading confidential information willy-nilly.

In fact, this was not a new development.

Since the original five families had been dethroned and replaced by the council of new order, some of the original members of the five ruling families started meeting with the devils. Brandon Morrison and Queen were, in fact, the only nascent cultivators who hadn't been a part of the secret meetings.

Lex had not noticed when they originally began, but they met so frequently that eventually he noticed it. But the few times he listened in, they were not plotting anything too nefarious. For the most part, they were developing their relationship for when the families felt ready to take back control. Moreover, they were buying special treasures from the devils directly to raise their cultivation levels quickly.

When the invasion began, Lex naturally spied on them as well to see what they were planning. But, unlike other times, they were having their meeting with the chamber of secrets. Even Lex couldn't spy in there, so all he could do was speculate.

Yet just providing this information to Miranda immediately switched their positions of power. Lex had not told her too much, and only insinuated that they might be plotting something with the devils. But that was enough. Even if she didn't show her desperation, the eye contact they shared was enough to communicate what needed to be said. It was in her best interests to follow Leo's lead, for they had no other allies to turn to.

Miranda only nodded, and walked out the room towards Leo.

"If you'll just follow me," said Leo, but didn't really give her an opportunity to do otherwise. The next moment both of them teleported away into a separate room within the chamber of secrets.

"Excuse the rush," Leo said as he sat down. "I'm in a bit of a hurry, and as I take it, you don't have much time to waste either."

Miranda was taken aback by Leo's forward attitude, as well as the fact that she had been teleported to another place so easily!

"We're in the chamber of secrets," Leo explained. "The reason I brought you here is because my issue is a sensitive one. I have a deal to offer you, and it's the only deal on the table. I need help in finding a few people on your planet. The quicker you can find them, or deliver the relevant information for me, the quicker I can help you out."

"What kind of help are you offering?" Miranda couldn't help but ask.

"Help resolve your issue with the invasion, of course."

"How exactly are you going to do that?" Miranda asked, suppressing the feeling of hope that suddenly swelled in her heart. No matter what, she would not allow herself to be swayed so easily. Things that sounded too good to be true usually were.

"If I tell you that, what's the point of the deal? You have to wait until your part of the deal is complete."

"Three people," Leo said, holding up three fingers. "Belle, Liz and Moon Williams. All three of them are sisters, and the oldest, Belle Williams, should have been working for your council in London in some capacity."

Miranda narrowed her eyes as various possibilities ran through her head. Before she could reach a solid conclusion, however, Leo interrupted her thoughts.

"Don't bother trying to jump to any conclusions. The reason I brought you into the chamber of secrets is because when you leave from here, all memories of my task will be erased from your mind. I understand you might not be able to fulfill my task on your own. That's fine. Anyone whose help you take will also have their memories removed."

Miranda frowned, but not because Leo told her about her memory being erased. It was instead because she realized the task was harder than it seemed. Had Leo asked her literally just a day ago, she could have completed the task in minutes. Now, however, it was all but impossible to locate a specific person on earth, let alone three of them.

"There is a small issue with locating them, but if the information you've given me of them is correct, I should be able to find out their recent location and circumstances. It will take some time."

"Excellent. We'll meet back here in a few hours. Don't bother trying to secretly pass the information of my request to unrelated people. I'll have a way to find out if you're lying to me."

Leo was about to leave but Miranda stopped him.

"Can you... do you know what the 'former' leaders of our planet are meeting the devils for?"

Leo gave her a knowing smile and said, "I cannot divulge sensitive information. It would violate our guests' privacy. The only reason I even told you about the meeting was because they weren't too secretive about it. If you had been paying attention, you would have noticed."

Miranda cursed internally, but she didn't need to hold back, as Leo had already disappeared.

Not wasting any more time, she quickly hurried back to the rest of the council members. She did not divulge Leo's request, but shared that he had promised the possibility of aid if she was able to fulfill her request. She also told them that they needed to keep an eye on their former family heads.

Technically, they were no longer a threat since there were quite a few nascent level cultivators on earth now, which was the original reason they were no longer under supervision. But it couldn't hurt to be sure. They couldn't afford any complications at this time.

With that done, she teleported back to earth. She needed to find a way to get information on those three girls. Unfortunately for her, her task immediately became a lot harder. The alien ships had reached England.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 559: Busy Bee

After leaving Miranda, Lex had returned to his office and sat there, seemingly looking at nothing. His connection to the Inn through his attire and his chair kept him updated on everything that was happening, while he tried to address his current mood. Truth be told, he was feeling ambivalent.

His family had not deigned to include him in their secret, yet here he was, searching out for his sisters. Although he didn't blame his sisters, he also could not help but feel betrayed. A part of him just wanted to go and confront William and get the truth. But a part of him also just stopped caring.

This was because... while he would not give up the search so easily, his time searching on earth had already given him a vague premonition. Lex was unaware of how to channel his intuition towards specific things accurately, but focusing on a task certainly seemed to help. For some odd reason, it felt like his intuition was telling him that whoever he was searching for was not on earth.

Lex had immense trust in his own intuition but, at the same time, he wanted to verify the truth. He would stick to his search until he had an answer, but he was already beginning to build an aversion towards earth.

He had always told himself that he couldn't possibly go out of his way to help everyone he came across in the universe. It was simply impossible, for there were too many in the universe suffering from unfortunate circumstances, and he was only one man. If he tried to help out everyone who needed his help, he'd soon run out of resources, and be unable to even help himself.

Yet he had already intervened one on Vegus Minima when he acted against the demons and devils, and now he was propping himself up once to help earth against these unknown enemies.

Lex couldn't help but sigh. He knew what he had to do. He had to cut himself off from these additional attachments, and focus entirely on developing and securing the Inn. It wasn't as if he didn't have troubles of his own cropping up now and then.

"This is the last time," he told himself audibly. "At least until I'm strong enough not to fear retaliation."

It wasn't as if helping was a bad thing. He just had to make sure to be able to protect himself first.

He turned his attention to the Inn. The refugee fund had gained a few more donors, and the refugees themselves were being settled well enough.

The immortal bastion was attracting more traffic. Some of it was because some guests simply liked it, but most of it consisted of soldiers and citizens of the empire.

The fishing event was going well, though Lex had not had the time to personally watch the event yet.

The ship... Lex paused. On top of his ship, there was an unconscious Sol bird!

"Mary, why didn't you tell me about this?" Lex asked as he investigated the bird.

Name: -

Age: 6

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Nascent realm

Species: Sol bird

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Emperor Swallow

Condition: Suffering from severe energy depletion. If untreated, and the bird is unable to recover on its own, the condition could become fatal. The Inn has no medical facilities able to treat this species.

Remarks: If the turtle were not cultivating, he would have adopted this one too!

"The situation is not as pressing as it seems," Mary said, appearing on his shoulder. For once, she was wearing a suit similar to the Host Attire, making her look both formal and elegant.

"The bird has woken up a few times, but always chooses to continue to nap here. It's a pro bono guest, so its expenses are not a concern."

"But according to its condition, it's suffering from energy depletion, and it doesn't seem to be getting better."

"That's a difficult situation to address. The Recovery rooms that you have are geared towards healing and treating only a very narrow range of species. While it has been working for most humanoids and beasts, any creature with even the slightest expression of any element is incapable of using it."

Lex did not ask what she meant by expression of element, for he already knew. The Sol bird, for example, seemed to have its entire body lit aflame. Another example was a beast he saw a long time ago from a race called Mercury Gloubin. Its entire body appeared to be made from a silverish liquid Lex could only guess was mercury.

Addressing the lack of machines that could heal these outliers was a concern, but not an easy one to address. It would be much easier to get a talented doctor instead, as the machines that could treat a broad range of races weren't really all that effective.

"I have an idea," said Lex, dismissing his unrelated thoughts.

He teleported himself and the bird over to the Fire Temple, which was situated right over a lake of lava. He didn't know what kind of energy the bird required, but he wondered if he could get it from the lava.

The unnamed Sol bird instantly woke up when it was teleported, but didn't seem to have the energy to react. It merely watched the Innkeeper with eyes that did not fully open.

"Hey, does that look like an environment that would suit you?" Lex asked, pointing down to the lava. When the bird looked down, it did react positively. In fact, it even became excited. But its eyes were fixed on the Fire Temple, not the lava.

That was not the reaction Lex was expecting, but it was good enough.

Lex summoned Fredrich, the first ever Draconian Apostle he had ever summoned. The Draconian Apostle were the second race of workers that Lex unlocked, but they could only survive in extreme environments, which is why he had never needed their assistance before.

"Take this guest to the Fire Temple and take care of him," said Lex to his worker that looked like a massive honey bee.

As he watched the bee-like worker carry the flaming bird away, he could not help but agree with the system for the first time. He had a strong feeling that if the Sovereign turtle were not cultivating, it would try to adopt the bird, just like he had done with the baby whale.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 560: Awkward

A few random thoughts ran through Lex's head after he sent the Sol bird to the fire temple. Was the energy that it needed to replenish divine energy? In that case, was it a deity? Or did divine energy have more uses?

Come to think of it, he himself had used divine essence to temper his body, and he got that from the crystal realm as well. Maybe in the crystal realm, divine energy had more uses.

He was only musing randomly when his personal holographic assistant informed him he had a new message. It was from Miranda, and she wanted to meet.

Lex frowned. It hadn't even been 20 minutes since their meeting ended. It was unlikely she had already found information on his sisters, which could only mean one thing. She had encountered an issue.

Lex teleported to her, ensuring to change his appearance to Leo's. The moment he laid eyes on her, his suspicion was confirmed. Miranda looked much worse off than he had left her only a short while ago, and was nursing a grievous wound on her right arm.

"The situation has taken a turn for the worst," she said, suppressing her pain.

Lex frowned, though not at what she was telling him.

"Hold on," he said and teleported out to his office. He sat on his chair and quickly scanned the Inn, finding a specific store in the Guild room.

Chen and Lily, who were running a business through the guild room, had become one of the most successful stores within the guild. That was because, as warriors who had spent their entire lives in conflict, they had a very deep understanding of what other soldiers, adventurers, and warriors needed.

From their store, he bought a number of medicines, including pain suppressors, and teleported back to Miranda, handing her the guild room cards containing the relevant items. The pain killer he didn't hand to her as a card, but channeled his spirit energy into it to reveal the item directly, and handed it to her.

The entire process took a couple of seconds only. It made it seem like Leo was a very considerate person, but in truth, he didn't want to risk Miranda messing up or making a mistake because she was too distracted by her pain. Of course, he didn't need to share that bit of information.

Miranda quickly drank the pain suppressor and visibly relaxed only a few moments later. That did not, however, change the fact that her hand was bleeding and looked like it needed medical attention.

"You were saying," said Leo, resuming the conversation.

"You may or may not know, but no technology is working on earth right now. I returned planning on finding out where the council's servers are stored, with plans of having them brought to the Inn. That way, we could access them. Not only would that help the council, but I would easily be able to track down the information on the three people you're looking for.

"Unfortunately, before I could make any real progress, the aliens attacked. They're dropping out of their ships anywhere they see people and suppressing them. Anyone who resists is killed immediately. The only reason I'm alive is not because I had any skill, but because I was fast enough in running away to the Inn."

Lex frowned. This was not good news. According to what he knew, the aliens shouldn't have been so tough, at least that's what Marlo had reported. But then again, Marlo's standards were in a league of his

own. More importantly, they had moved pretty quickly. Lex had assumed it would be days if not weeks for them to make their way to England. After all, even without their technology, Europe was not a pushover. There were a considerable number of cultivators there who should have put up a fight.

Before Lex could think of a solution, Miranda proposed one of her own.

"If the Inn can provide its aid, we can stabilize the situation. That way, we can help you out as well."

Leo scoffed.

"I think you have the wrong idea. Just to be clear, the help I was offering was a way for you to use the Inn's services to help yourself. The Midnight Inn is a neutral organization, and we do not participate in conflicts as a third party."

Having said that, Lex felt a grain of doubt in his mind. Should he offer up the help he had promised? The longer he waited, the more people would possibly die. He didn't want that on his conscience.

Ugh, it was such an unnecessary hassle being a good buy. It would have been so much easier if he had the conscience of a villain or something.

"If I send someone to earth, do you have anything that can guide that person to your servers?"

Miranda paused, but didn't waste too much time speculating about the insinuations of the information Leo had revealed.

"Strictly speaking, while devices running on electricity are not working, spirit tech, which relies solely on spirit energy, is still operational. The council's servers are in a secure, hidden facility that is protected by a defensive formation. I should be able to fashion something that can locate the facility."

"Alright, in that case, you get me that locator, and I'll send someone to procure those servers. At the same time, once I have the locator, I'll share the information you need."

Miranda nodded and quickly hurried out to begin making the locator.

Lex, on the other hand, cursed the fact that Zagan was still stuck in his test. If he had passed, then Lex could have made him a valet and sent him to earth to procure the servers. Now, he would have to do it on his own. Not that he had a problem with doing it himself - he just assumed that it would be much faster if the immortal monster was doing it.

What was taking him so long anyway?

He shook his head. It didn't matter. He better go prepare some gear for his impending excursion. It would not do if his clothes got disintegrated during a war. He would feel too awkward.