

Innkeeper 641

The Innkeeper

Chapter 641: Departure

After delivering his speech, Lex left the podium and let the banquet progress normally. He no longer felt like the mood of the banquet needed to be fun or jovial. Considering that the 1000 workers would be heading off to the battlefield, he felt that the rest of the time should be spent with the focus on them. After all, no matter how much Lex helped them prepare, there was a very real possibility that they might not make it back.

Still, the mood the rest of the time was very relaxed. If the workers felt nervous or anxious, they did not show it. Instead, they kept gushing over how much they liked their new suits. If one overheard their conversations, one would assume they would be heading to a field trip rather than to war.

Soon, a live orchestra standing on a cloud nearby began to play live music, and the banquet transitioned to the dance. This was quite entertaining to watch actually, since most people didn't really know any real dances, but as cultivators of various levels, they were quite adept in movement techniques. As a result, the Inn workers were making up dances on the go, which resulted in quite an interesting show.

The most interesting was the dance between Little Blue and the Sol bird. They were flying around, swinging like crazy in the air. Wherever Little Blue flew drops of water fell like rain, since it was still learning to control its ability, and whenever the bird passed by the drops evaporated instantly. Since the Inn protected everyone from the bird's heat, to the viewers it all seemed just like an interesting smoke show. Moreover, due to the constant rain and light, rainbows were formed wherever the two went.

With no one truly leading and showing them how it was done, the workers truly did end up doing whatever they wanted. Some bunnies began mounting peacocks and strut around one another, as if challenging each other to a dance duel. The massive, evolved Magikarpet had the turtle ride on its head and shook around, as if it was trying to dance as well.

The humans were not to be left behind either. They grabbed hands and spun each other round and around till one of them had their feet lifted into the air and began flying, until the other one suddenly let go, sending them flying towards a specific target. The humans... began playing darts using other humans...

Left didn't know whether to laugh or cry as he watched what they did, but decided not to interfere. There was no designated way to enjoy oneself, and if they were enjoying themselves by behaving like idiots... well, one had to remember that most of them were just one year old.

He teleported away, no longer overseeing the workers. The thing he had to do next was prepare to send his workers to the battlefield. It was really easy, since he had been provided a teleportation formation - he only needed to set it up.

He had never sent one of his workers outside the Inn before, although theoretically it shouldn't be an issue. In essence, in the way that he could choose to teleport to any place connected to the Inn, he could send his workers too. After all, if there was no mechanism to send out his employees then he wouldn't have received a quest to recruit Marlo as a porter oh so long ago.

Deploying the formation was... disappointingly easy. The lead up to the workers departure felt agonizingly slow to Lex, but eventually the banquet ended, and the next day came. But all the workers did not return to their posts just yet, and instead stood in silence as they watched the 1000 gathered workers.

It was time for them to go, but no one had any words left to say. They could only watch, and pray.

When the Innkeeper appeared, he summoned Luthor to have a private word with him first.

"I don't expect it to be a problem, but make sure that you all stay together. You all have to make sure to protect one another. While there will be others there with you, and they will be your allies, that is only theoretical. The only ones you can trust are each other. Everyone has a couple of keys with them, in case they ever need it, but I want you to take this as well."

Lex held out one of his Innkeeper business cards, drenched in the aura of the Innkeeper.

"If you run into any problems, or if they try to split you all up, don't hesitate to call me through the card. Though the Midnight Inn is sending a force to contribute in inane war, that does not mean we can be pushed around."

Luthor took the card and tucked it safely in the inner pocket of his coat. Although the Innkeeper told him not to hesitate in summoning him, Luthor decided not to summon the Innkeeper unless it was the last resort,

"As for the rest... treat this as a learning experience. The comrades you make during war are special, and cannot be discovered in simple times. Go, expand your contacts, as well as your horizons."

Luthor nodded in confirmation, but did not say anything. The Innkeeper was clearly trusting him to lead the others, which was a monumental task. Perhaps one would expect such a task to go to Gerard, based on his position as the head of security, but Lex felt he did not have the right temperament. Perhaps as long as he was within the Inn, it didn't matter so much, but on a battlefield, only someone as ruthless as Luthor would suffice.

With everything said, Luthor returned to the others, and they were teleported away. There was no fanfare of fancy speeches. Lex did not feel like there was a need to drag the matter on endlessly. Sometimes, it was better to just get on with it quickly.

With the workers sent out of the Inn, Lex prepared to return to the Crystal realm and complete his quest, but he was interrupted by the sound of a familiar notification.

System Notification: Hidden quest completed!

The teleportation away from the Inn was seamless, despite it being powered by a formation provided by someone else. That was because with the Inn's upgraded teleportation abilities, Lex had more or less hijacked the teleportation point. Of course, just because there was an easy way to reach the destination did not mean that it was linked to the Inn. Not yet anyway, but that didn't matter.

When the 1000 workers of the Inn teleported over, they were instantly overwhelmed. Since this was the first time any of them left the Inn, they were not prepared for the 'polluted' and 'impure' air of the universe. The smell of synthetic cleaners filled the massive hall they teleported in, almost making them gag, but they controlled themselves. They knew war wasn't going to be easy. It only made sense that it shouldn't smell great either.

The group had teleported inside a dedicated teleportation area which was one of many in the entire hall. There were easily tens of thousands more troops appearing every minute, and they all wore different kinds of armors and gear. There was a host of personnel standing ready, guiding and registering each and every new group.

One such person approached the group from the Inn, dressed in a brown jumpsuit and a helmet sporting a silver visor, hiding the person's face.

"Welcome to battlefield 00974. Is there a designated leader among your group?"

Luthor stepped forward, standing face to face with the man. Much like the group, the man was in the Foundation realm, so when Luthor stepped near, his surging aura momentarily stunned him.

"Aff-affiliated group and number of soldiers, please," the man stuttered, unable to calm himself down in time.

"Midnight Inn, 1000 soldiers," Luthor said succinctly. Although the Innkeeper had told him to make comrades, he did not think he was referring to a weak floor worker like this.

"Midnight Inn... 1000 soldiers... alright I've registered your arrival. Someone will lead you to have your identities logged, and then your assignments will be given to you."

"Wherever we go, we will go together. We will not be separated," informed Luthor. Even if he didn't already have such thoughts, the Innkeeper repeatedly emphasized that they should stay together, so he would never compromise on this.

"You specialize in group combat? Well that shouldn't be an issue. Continue on with registration, and be sure to mention that you've trained for group combat. No one will want to diminish your combat effectiveness, so you'll all be stationed together."

Luthor nodded, as if that was barely an acceptable answer, and then began leading his group forward. He was pleased that no one had tried to split them up, and he took note of the 'group combat' that the previous man had mentioned. Hopefully, there won't be any problems later either. It would suck if he had to beat someone up so soon.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 642: Let Z take the lead

System Notification: Hidden quest complete!

Hidden quest: The Midnight Inn is a bastion and a safe haven for all guests from across the universe. Yet such a refuge is bound to attract hostile attention. Sometimes, dealing with miscreants when they arrive at the Inn is already too late. Take proactive measures to eliminate forces hostile to the Inn before they arrive at the Inn!

Quest reward: Midnight Battalion panel unlocked!

Remarks: Even a broken clock is right twice a day, but it took you over a year to do something right once.

Lex was stunned. Midnight Battalion? Alright, he could openly and clearly admit that the Midnight Inn was a little different from what one would expect from an Inn... maybe. But what kind of Inn had its own battalion? Although, he could somewhat understand the system's motives.

While he was sure that a lot of the beings that visit the Inn could be convinced to holster their hostile nature if they had one, there were bound to be many that just would not do so. If that were the case, it made sense to go out and face them directly. But, that way, wouldn't he end up fighting beings across the universe?

No, that surely wasn't what this was for. It was most likely that the purpose of the battalion was to go out and face specific targets who were enemies of the Inn. Yes, that made sense. In fact, why should he limit himself just to a battalion? Didn't he have a secret news agency? Couldn't he spread spies across the universe to gather secret intel? Or be on the lookout for more inheritances which he could add to his inheritance hall?

Once Lex started thinking like this, he realized that the possibilities were endless. Why did he have to personally go to the emporium every time he needed a trade? Couldn't he set up a trading outfit or organization which got the Inn supplies which the system didn't naturally provide it with?

Lex reigned in his excitement and first took a look at the Midnight Battalion panel. If it was anywhere near as multifunctional and overarching as the event panel, Lex could not even begin to imagine the power.

Yet, much to Lex's chagrin, almost all the functions in the panel were grayed out and couldn't even be seen, let alone used.

"Mary, why is this new panel inoperable?" Lex asked, slightly annoyed.

"Since the battalion is supposed to operate outside the Inn, it is difficult for the system to perform optimally considering its damaged state. I cannot say for certain, but I expect you will need to repair 20 or 25% functionality before the panel starts showing more features."

Lex controlled his disappointment and looked at the one single feature for the battalion which was available.

It was called 'Battle formations'. After opening it, Lex began to peruse it and found that it was actually quite useful. For the first time since he received the Butter Knife, the system finally gave him a method of attacking someone directly.

It was quite convenient because much like the formations he could buy for the Inn, he could buy battle formations for his battalion, and the system would automatically send the information to his battalion. Unfortunately, it could not make them proficient from the get go, and it would require training. But at least this way he had a way of directly purchasing things from the system rather than looking around in place like the emporium.

As he was perusing the list of formations, his eyes suddenly locked onto a specific one. He read the name and then the description of the formation, then read it several more times just to be sure he wasn't making a mistake.

Considering it was a formation for Foundation realm cultivators, it was quite expensive at 120 million MP. When it was factored in that the suits Lex got each and everyone of them for 100 million that sounded like it was quite cheap, but that was only because Lex went unnecessarily overboard in having the suit made. A budget of 100 million for a suit was more appropriate for earth immortals, but Lex did not care about such minor details when it came to the life of his oldest and most trusted workers.

Still, this formation... Lex bought it immediately.

Another result of the battalion panel was that, once Lex registered the battalion, he would be able to directly speak to the commander of the battalion even when he was outside the Inn. Otherwise, once workers of the Inn left, he would be unable to contact them. Fortunately, this was a feature of the panel, and not a service, so Lex could employ it even now.

As soon as he bought the formation, he knew the information would be transmitted to them directly. But he needed to pass some instructions to ensure maximum effectiveness.

"If you end up needing to use the battle formation I sent you, do not control it yourself. Have Z take control of the formation."

Luthor would get the message, though Luthor himself would have no way of answering. If he wanted to do that, he would have to activate the business card the Innkeeper gave him, but it would be a waste to use it just for this. Since he would get the message, Lex turned his attention back to other things.

He had inspected his body quite thoroughly, using his own senses as well as checking his status through the system, but there was no mention or indication of any 'inscriptions' on his body. But Lex did not doubt at all that they were there. He just needed to discover a way to locate, and then remove them.

However, since he could not do that right now, there was only one thing left for him to do at the Inn.

He put on his Leo persona, and teleported away. When he reappeared, he was in front of the Midnight tailor! He had been extremely impressed by the suits that had been made for everyone, and wanted one of his own!

Not bothering to knock, he walked in to find Geeves sprawled on a reclining sofa, snoring lightly. Drool was dripping down his cheek and a small puddle had formed on the ground near him.

Lex could not really blame him for his state, the man had worked himself to the bone the past few days. Still, every employee had a bedroom they could visit any time. Was there really a need to sleep here, like this?

Lex cleared his throat, hoping it would rouse the man, to no avail. He tried again, a little louder, but there was still no result. In the end, he nudged Geeves' foot with his own, startling the sleeping man!

He jumped up as if he was being ambushed, and held out clenched fists as if he was ready to fight, but he still had no idea what was happening. He looked left and right, trying to discern his location and what was happening.

The poor fellow was completely disoriented, and it took him a couple of minutes to realize that he was, in fact, not being assaulted.

"Oh, oh dear, excuse my rather poor display," the man said to Leo, as he wiped the drool off his cheek. "I must have dozed off while packing up."

"It's not a problem. I understand you've had a busy few days."

"That's one way of putting it..." Geeves muttered under his breath as he slowly made his way behind the counter, and then looked at Leo. Truthfully, he had no intention of working until he got a full and proper rest, but since Leo was already here, it didn't hurt to at least hear him out.

"How can I help you, today?" Geeves said, once he positioned himself. Considering the high prestige requirement to use his shop, one would think he'd have a lot of free time.

"I was quite impressed by the suits you made for the 1000 workers heading out," Lex praised openly. "Especially since I could tell that each one boasts commendable protective capabilities."

Geeves, who was clearly still exhausted, snorted at Lex's remark.

"Commendable? Protective capabilities? My good man, they can walk in the vacuum of space in those suits! They can walk through fire and water, through chaotic spirit energy fields and literal space distortions! Those perfectly soft, air purifying, energy filtering suits are not only completely designed to support a wide range of movement, they can survive any kind of environment that can be thrown at them. My good man, the garbs of deities themselves pale in comparison to my suits! That's literally not an over-exaggeration, because those suits can refine divine energy as well!

"At the Foundation realm, there is literally nothing those soldiers can face which could cause a single stitch in those suits to rip! One of the lads said they are experimenting with teleportation, and wondered if the suit could survive. So I literally lined the suit with a special material, which can literally allow him to swim through the folds of space. Pft. Survive. Commendable protective capabilities. Child, you clearly don't have the same vision as the Innkeeper and I, so don't try to boast empty compliments. You'll only embarrass yourself."

Chapter 643: Don't believe in being humble

"If you end up needing to use the battle formation I sent you, do not control it yourself. Have Z take control of the formation."

Luthor was momentarily stunned when he heard the Innkeeper's voice in his mind, but it all made sense when a mere moment later information regarding a certain battle formation just appeared in his mind. The timing for this... couldn't possibly have been better, which proved that even now, the Innkeeper was keeping an eye on them.

"Look, I don't care where you're from or who your backer is," said a rough looking man in military uniform holding a tablet.

"War is not a joke, and can't run on the whim of every little princess who thinks she deserves special accommodation. We need to know the strength level and capability of each and every asset so we can position you accordingly, and be sure you can do your job well. That means we will test everyone individually, and assign them roles as such. If you insist that your..." the man gave a dirty side glance to the paltry 1000 soldiers among the millions this facility processed everyday before continuing, "your 'group' is focused towards 'group combat' then you need to be tested accordingly, and need to pass the minimum performance threshold. Only, and only then will you be allowed to stay together. If you have a problem with that, take it up with someone who cares. Or better yet, get lost and go back where you came from. I don't have time to babysit you lot."

The man had a much higher cultivation realm than Luthor and the rest, which is why he remained unaffected by their suppressive aura for the most part. Moreover, he could identify the luxurious material their 'gear' was made from at a glance, and was thus convinced that the group in front of him consisted of nothing but a bunch of untested greenhorns who had simply been showered in expensive equipment. Such people would never last in a real battle.

He was extremely irritated at the group, but what he didn't realize was that Luthor was irritated too. So what if his cultivation was greater? Luthor was not intimidated. So what if he saw larger armies everyday? They could not compete with those from the Inn. So what if they had countless others coming to fight in their war? They were the ones who had asked the Inn to come, not the other way around!

"Take me to your testing facility, and be quick about it," said Luthor as if he were talking to someone beneath him. "I'm here to fight a war, not stroke the ego of some office worker."

Sure, he was normally extremely courteous towards guests at the Inn, but that didn't mean everyone deserved such an attitude. Besides, he was not a believer in being humble or down to earth when he had the qualifications to back himself up.

Behind his black mask his expressions were hidden, but the extreme derisive tone of his voice could not be hidden. The soldier talking to Luthor turned red, and his anger surged, but he controlled himself. Regardless of what he felt, the discipline of the army had to be maintained, and that was the only thing that kept him from lashing out at Luthor. Little did he know, even if he lashed out it would make no difference.

Unwilling to speak further, the soldier led Luthor and the rest to a testing chamber, completely skipping the queue in which they normally would have had to wait. He sent them in, while he himself went into the control room.

"Survive for a minimum of one hour," he spoke into a mic, not really bothering to let Luthor and the rest get into formation, and began the test at the hardest difficulty! He was breaking more than a few standard operating procedures, and everyone in the room was slightly concerned, but the man was radiating a murderous aura that stopped them from interfering.

As an army of Foundation realm soldiers, the battlefield they were sent to naturally managed their power level. Due to various restrictions and limitations, there were many zones and worlds where the interference of higher level cultivators was extremely difficult if not downright impossible. That did not change the fact that those regions held crucial strategic value.

As such, armies at all power levels were required. Clearly, due to such restrictions, the enemies they would face would at most be slightly more powerful than them. But when the test began at the highest difficulty, what the soldiers from the Inn faced was a purely theoretical threat that they were never expected to actually encounter.

A nascent level robot appeared in the testing hall, alongside an army of 5000 golden core cultivators. The power difference made this a purely impossible force for 1000 foundation realm soldiers to face, and was normally used to test cutting edge technology or extreme innovations in battle formations.

The soldiers from the Midnight Inn, however, did not really know it. Nor were they even alarmed. It wasn't as if none of them had faced a nascent level cultivator before, and each of them had recently even gotten a power up from the star rank increase.

Still, Luthor was not in the mood to do things casually.

"Z, according to the Innkeepers orders, you will be in command of our latest battle formation. Let's get this over with, we have better things to do."

The opposing force did not wait for them, and was already rushing towards them to attack, yet none of the soldiers from the Inn panicked. With extreme precision and efficiency, as if this was not the first time ever they were employing this battle formation, everyone got in position and began channeling their designated techniques.

How this worked was that each of them served as an individual gear in a much larger machine, and thus each of them used a different spiritual technique that served no purpose alone, but when done so in tandem with 999 others who were also using corresponding techniques, gave birth to an awesome phenomenon.

A black, menacing cloud enveloped the entire army, and a few moments later, when it disappeared revealed not the soldiers who were standing there previously, but a massive, 45 feet tall (14 meters) suited mech!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 644: Educated by a professional

In the testing room, the soldier who had set up the test, as well as everyone else, were all startled by the change. What kind of technique was this? They had seen a lot of different kinds of techniques, but never one that turned an entire army into a seemingly massive robot.

To be clear, the battlefield they were currently at was not run by the Jotun empire, but by a subsidiary force of the Elven empire. As such, they had a much greater exposure and history than that of humans. Still, this was something completely unprecedented. Moreover, it was not the optics of the situation that was an issue. Even in the control room, separated by a protected wall, they felt a sense of danger.

In the testing hall, neither the invading force paused nor the Midnight mech. Even Z did not pause to appreciate how awesome this moment felt for him. Since the Innkeeper had trusted him with this responsibility, he would live up to it.

Silently, the mech moved. Despite its ridiculous speed, it caused no sound as its lithe and nimble frame moved through the hall, let alone the sonic booms it should have caused due to its velocity.

In one single move, which was too fast for those in the control room to see clearly, the mech attacked. A moment later, it appeared in the opposite end of the hall, its back towards the enemies it had crossed. Yet it did not really even need to turn back, for a few seconds later all the attacking robots exploded!

Not a single one survived the single attack. The Midnight battalion, after its first successful combat test, ended their technique, dissipating the awesome mech as if it was a mirage. All that was left were 1000 soldiers, standing there unimpressed. Even the bunnies in their daycare faced more of a challenge than this.

"Child, you clearly don't have the same vision as the Innkeeper and I, so don't try to boast empty compliments. You'll only embarrass yourself," said Geeves. He was not happy at all upon receiving a compliment on his work. That was because the person paying the compliment did not even understand enough of what he did to even pay a proper compliment.

Lex, on the other hand, did not feel offended by Geeves' seemingly rude attitude. First of all, the man was seriously sleep deprived, so he could not be blamed for being grumpy. Secondly, so long as he did a good job, why did it matter if he had a bit of an attitude?

"Like I was saying, the suit you made thoroughly impressed me. I wanted to order one for myself as well."

It hardly surprised Geeves to hear as such. Who wouldn't want his suits? Rather, it was the fact that Leo could even order a suit from him that was curious. Just because they were workers at the Inn did not mean they could so easily be exempted from the privilege requirements. Similar to how there were privileges for guests, the official workers of the Inn were also ranked based on how long they had worked, their performance, customer satisfaction, etc.

The only reason why it was not relevant before was because Lex was manually setting up privilege requirements, so he never put them up for his workers. The tailor shop, however, naturally had a restriction on it so the same applied to the workers.

Still, monitoring workers ranks was not Geeves' job. Since Leo was here, the man clearly had the qualification.

"What kind of suit do you have in mind?" he asked, as he massaged his temples. Even if he didn't plan on working immediately on the suit, he took his job very seriously. As such, he needed all his presence of mind for when he took orders.

"I have a very... unique problem," Leo confessed as he scratched his head. "I don't really care about defense or protection, as it's already very hard for anything to hurt me. Instead, I just want clothes that are extremely durable, so that I won't end up naked while fighting or facing a dangerous situation. Since my body is so durable, I end up facing more extreme situations than anyone else would normally face."

Geeves nodded as he took in Leo's requirements and ran a few ideas through his mind.

"Any style requirements?" he asked.

"You did a good job with the previous suits, so I'll defer to your judgment on that."

Geeves nodded once again, as if that was the correct answer.

"What about your budget?"

"Let's just say my budget is... big. So long as my needs can be met, the price is irrelevant."

Geeves nodded once more. That's what he liked to hear. But instead of continuing to ask Leo questions, Geeves moved from behind the counter and approached him. He put an arm around Leo's shoulder and patted it a few times before he spoke.

"Child, I understand your requirements. But I have a small suggestion - a small amendment to your requirements, if you will. As a professional, it is my job to educate you about the possibilities even you don't realize."

Geeves paused, and then sighed. He was truly exhausted, so it was hard to focus. But at the same time, inspiration filled him, and he needed to get it out.

"Imagine you're facing a foe," he said, waving his hand out in front of them, as if that would conjure up an image of Leo fighting an enemy.

"Imagine your foe's desperation, his sheer tenacity and will as he uses everything he can to fight you. Imagine that he fails, but manages to escape. Through planning and scheming, and unsavory alliances, the foe returns, this time prepared better to face you. Through the culmination of all his hard work, he finally manages to pierce through your nigh indestructible armor - your suit. He tastes the sweet nectar of ambrosia as he finally succeeds, peeling away your defense, leaving you vulnerable to harm. For surely someone who relies on such resilient armor must be weak himself, right? He is at his zenith, only to fall to an agonizing and hellish nadir when he realizes that your defense is higher still than your seemingly impenetrable armor. 'Why', he roars to the heavens moments before you strike him down. 'Why would someone as strong as you even need such an indestructible armor' he wonders in his last moments? The answer... it is simple. You may not really need that extra bit of defense, but since your foes don't know that, why not frustrate them a little? You see lad, that is called playing with your enemies."

For a moment, Lex was startled. Then, he grinned.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 645: Lex is fat

Lex felt like he was meeting Geeves for the first time, and he quite liked it. Even if his prior meeting had not been extremely brief, how could Geeves show off his sadistic side in front of the Innkeeper? He had been on his best behavior. But now, in front of Leo, in his extremely sleep deprived state, Geeves has thoroughly lost all inhibition, and so let his true self show.

What Lex didn't realize was that his true self was not a sadist as he made it seem like, no. His true self was an artist, and he exhibited his art through his suits. The appearance of the suit was just the surface of the art. The functionality of the suit is what gave his art depth.

"I like the idea," confirmed Lex. "What are the limits of what you can do with the suit?"

"Currently, the shop has a limit on the kinds of materials I can access. The materials I can access are on the nascent realm level, at most. If you can bring me better materials from outside, I can improve the suit further, but until then you would have to make do. Having said that, even at the nascent realm, the kinds of materials I have access to are numerous.

"How many things you want to add to the suit play a great role in how I can use the materials. For example, with my previous suits, although they may seem impressive to you, I was actually severely limited in what I could do. It was not budgetary constraints that stopped me, nor was it the material. Instead, it was the physical strength and power level of those who were going to wear it.

"Just because it looks like a suit does not mean that it has to be light. The more leeway I have, the more I can be liberal with the kinds of materials I can use. You'll understand more in a moment. Come, let me take your measurements."

Geeves took off his coat and folded it over his arm as he led Lex deeper into the mansion. Each room and corridor had walls lined with various fabrics in a seemingly infinite number of colors. The truth was, the number of colors the tailor shop was catering to far exceeded the spectral range humans could see, which is why there was such a need for such a vast collection. The true, genuinely valuable materials weren't even stored here. They were in a basement, stored in isolated, temperature controlled rooms. The materials were so volatile, they needed to undergo various kinds of treatments before they could be added into suits.

"You said I can bring materials from outside. What kind of materials do you mean? Should I be looking for some alien sheep producing celestial cotton or something?"

"My young, ignorant lad, if you can get your hands on celestial cotton, or better yet an animal capable of producing celestial cotton, you'll become an instant multibillionaire. Every inch of it is worth several hundred million MP, and that's in its unrefined form. Heck, I don't even have the facilities to process it, so better not waste your time daydreaming about that. No, a more realistic expectation would be to get

your hands on precious ores, woods and other natural materials which have unique qualities. Turning them into fabric will be my task."

The two continued to casually chat for a while until they reached a small room filled with strips of fabric, multiple mannequins and various kinds of inch tapes!

"Stand here please," Geeves said as he pointed to a small, circular pedestal. He put his coat aside, rolled up his sleeves and grabbed a yellow measuring tape before hanging it around his neck like a doctor with a stethoscope. He put on a pair of glasses that hung delicately on his nose and stood at the ready to start measuring Lex.

Lex hadn't really had a personalized suit made before so he did not know what the measuring process would entail, but it definitely did not include the extreme raise in gravity that he experienced as soon as he stepped on the pedestal.

If Lex had to guess, the gravity was at least twice or thrice that of earth, yet it kept increasing exponentially. Of course, such an increase posed no burden to Lex for the moment, as his body was extremely strong. But the pedestal wasn't trying to test his physical limits, so it never pushed him to the maximum of what he could manage. Instead, it was trying to determine his comfort range. At the exact moment he felt even the slightest bit of strain due to the increased gravity, the pedestal immediately returned to normal.

Geeves started writing something down in his notes as he walked around Lex with a clipboard.

After a couple of moments, the temperature around Lex began increasing. Similar to what happened with the gravity, it stopped the moment Lex's body displayed even the hint of becoming uncomfortable.

Then, after returning to normal, the temperature started to drop.

"Raise your hands, please," Geeves said, prompting Lex to raise them to his sides. He was standing like a massive 'T' but Geeves still did not approach him to measure the length of his arms. Instead, two parrots, one red and one blue, appeared and sat on his palms. An unusual energy was channeled through their claws into Lex's body, or at least tried to. Piercing his skin and entering his body turned out to be a greater challenge than Geeves expected. The man was actually surprised when there was no result for a couple of minutes, but eventually the energies managed to enter Lex's body.

They were not harming him in any way. Instead, it appeared as if they were mapping Lex's meridians that covered the surface of his body.

"Understanding how your body interacts with energy, and where your body's channels are, is crucial to designing a suit," Geeves explained while the process continued. "Even if I'm making the ultimate defensive suit, I cannot forget to augment your body's basic functions as best as possible."

The process was painfully slow, and took almost 20 minutes, but Geeves did not seem irritated at the slow progress. Instead, he was very pleased. Such a high quality body would be able to don an extremely high quality, yet equally taxing suit.

A glass tube appeared around the pedestal and sealed Lex in, before water began to fill it. Once the tube was completely filled, the pressure the water exerted on Lex's body began increasing. At the same time, millions of tiny fish swam out, and began measuring each and every hair on Lex's body. That... genuinely made him awkward. The system had once accused him of having a hairy back, which wasn't exactly false but he felt like the system greatly exaggerated. Lex would not shy away from taking his shirt off in public. But when each individual hair was being measured...

Of course, none of the fish came near Lex's private parts - mostly because he kept it blocked with a thick and dangerous layer of his spirit sense.

After the water, Lex was subjected to multiple other strange and unexpected tests that measured his body's performance and capabilities. There was even one that detected the level of body odor he produced!

When the process finally ended Lex sighed in relief. These measurements were really too intense.

"Would you like to read your results?" Geeves asked, as he continued to note stuff down. "Guests often become curious."

"Sure, why not?" said Lex as he walked up to him and glanced at the clipboard. Two measurements in particular genuinely surprised Lex!

The first was his height. He had reached six feet three inches (190 cm). His height had increased. Granted the increase was not massive, but he hadn't even noticed the small change. He wondered if it was a result of his cultivation, or the multiple refinements his body underwent. There was no way of knowing.

But what really surprised, and in fact devastated him, was his weight! The last time he checked his weight, or at least what he remembered, he was 185 pounds (83 kgs). That was quite a lot for his height, which meant that he was a little fat. Or that he had a lot of muscle. It was totally the second one. But now... now he was a massive and unfathomable 712 pounds (325 kgs)!

With his mouth hung open, Lex looked down at his muscular and chiseled body. He couldn't claim to be fat, but it wasn't as if he was bulging out muscles either! What was up with that weight?

In the end... he could only reluctantly accept the fact that all the materials he had absorbed into his body had increased his weight, substantially.

It was fortunate that he wasn't weight conscious at all, or else he would have been crying over these results. He totally wasn't doing that right now. His eyes were just shining and glistening due to how clear and beautiful they were.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 646: Spreading the news

The measurement process was unusual, to say the least. By the end of it Geeves drew up a few mock designs as well to show Lex and get his feedback. Through the process, where Lex learned more and more about the suits and what they could do, he eventually realized that they were going to be much more useful to him than he anticipated.

For now, the suit he was getting aimed at being a general, all purpose one that he could use in his day to day matters, but already he had thought of various other suits he could have made. For example, the few times where he hunted with Fenrir, he realized the wolf's stealth capabilities were extremely useful. While Lex could not replicate them, he had the Orions scales which could be used for the same purpose. In fact, he already handed them over to Geeves and asked him to make a second suit, for the express purpose of stealth.

That would take a while, as Geeves would have to make the first suit first, then process Orion's scales and then use the fabric made from it to make the suit, which would be completely different.

Unlike the previous 1000 suits which had been made in a rush, Lex's suit gave Geeves a lot more leeway to do as he wished, and so the making of the suit would take much longer. Once Geeves had properly rested, it would take about a week to deliver both suits. That was a long time, considering Geeves had no other orders, but Lex did not complain. He simply paid a deposit of 100 million MP and then left.

With no other tasks left to distract or occupy him, Lex was now FINALLY free to return to the Crystal realm. Fueled by a sense of urgency, if it were up to Lex, he would immediately depart on his journey to find Valesco, yet it was not meant to be.

The last time he was here Jolene, the mother of Pvarti's fiance, had requested Lex facilitate her in the handover of some 'secret' items over to someone else. Naturally, the handover had been successful, and now Jolene wanted to expand the scope of their cooperation.

Lex had been dealing with the matter using his projection, but he felt he might benefit if he went and took a look at matters first hand, as his instincts would play a better role then.

But even that was a secondary matter. The first thing he had to deal with was the Trelop from whom Lex had taken the Cosmic Erosion Elixir.

Lex had scooped all the elixir away and teleported to the Inn while he was still in the Trelops territory, so naturally when he returned to the Crystal realm, that's where he reappeared.

The first thing he noticed once he returned was that the area already looked much better. The massive crowd that had gathered trying to reach the elixir had dispersed, and all the dead and decayed plants nearby had been removed. In fact, new saplings had already been planted and Lex could see that they were growing at an abnormally fast pace. He could only accredit that to Toro, the Trelop controlling the area.

One thing he had noticed, though vaguely, was that the Trelops he had encountered all seemed ridiculously powerful. Even when compared to other races in the same realm, Trelops maintained an overwhelming advantage.

It was while Lex was musing on the incredible strength of Trellops that a familiar fish made of grass and seaweed appeared in the distance, swimming towards him.

Lex waited patiently for the Trellop to arrive, and greeted him immediately.

"Good day senior. I hope you have not been troubled once again after I resolved the issue last time."

"You and you GODDAMN etiquettes!" Toro roared in frustration as soon as he heard Lex speak. Regardless of how unusual this particular Trellop may be, Lex remembered the importance of remaining extremely polite and respectful with him.

"I will take that as if everything is well."

"You're GODDAMN right everything is well," he said in frustration. "As soon as that stinking liquid disappeared, everything quickly returned to normal... or close enough. What the hell was that thing? How did you get rid of it? How can you teleport within my territory without my permission?"

Lex smiled weakly. He was not sure if he should reveal what he had learned... but then decided it was better to reveal what he knew than to hide it. Clearly something was wrong with this realm, and in the off chance that the anomaly was not common knowledge, the entire realm could be in jeopardy. He did not want the destruction of an entire realm on his conscience just so that he could benefit a little from the situation first.

"Originally, I did not know what the elixir was as well, so I went to consult a senior."

Lex produced a golden key, and threw it towards Toro.

"You can use this golden key to go to a place known as the Midnight Inn. I used it too, that's how I was able to teleport away. There, I consulted a senior and learnt that the liquid was called Cosmic Erosion Elixir. I obviously do not understand the specifics of the matter but... the senior told me that the liquid is only formed when... when an entire realm is destabilizing and on the path to destruction."

Lex paused, and waited to see the Trelops reaction. Based on his bombastic personality, he was expecting a great response, but no such thing came. At first, Lex quickly assumed that knowledge of the realms impending demise was common knowledge. But then, when he looked at the lost face of the Trellop, another theory popped up in his mind.

Before he could verify his theory, the Trellop confirmed it for him by asking, "what the GODDAMN hell is a realm, and what does it have to do with my territory?"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 647: Suddenly protective

Lex had a... difficult... time explaining to Toro what a realm was, though Lex had a sneaking suspicion that the Trellop understood the concept somewhere in the middle of the explanation, but was just venting its frustration on Lex.

When it finally understood, Toro displayed a remarkable amount of 'not screaming' at Lex randomly. Instead, it became silent as it contemplated the ramifications of what it had heard.

The issue that it was facing was not the destruction of its entire world - that was a given based on the situation. The issue was that Lex did not have a solid grasp of the timeline. According to what Lex said, the appearance of the elixir meant that the realm was on the path to destruction, but the fact that it was on that path also meant that it could be veered off that path. The top minds of the realm would think of ways to work on the issue, but it all depended on how long they had.

If one thought of the timeline in terms of the geographic time scale of planets in the origin realm, even millions of years were considered a short time. Theoretically, since the realm was even bigger than planets, the timeline should similarly be greater, right?

But not only was there no way of confirming how long they had, there was also no way of knowing just how bad the situation had become. Maybe the elixir had already started appearing across the Crystal realm hundreds of millions of years ago, and this was just its latest occurrence.

All in all, there was too much uncertainty.

"Do not spread this information lightly," Toro finally said after contemplating for a while. "Spreading panic will not help anyone. I will contact the elders of my race to see what they know. In the meantime, I suggest you find a way to contact the Crystal race. Regardless of what anyone says, they are the true rulers of this realm. If the other races are allowed to exist, it is through their will. If the Kraven are allowed to invade, it is due to their indifference. The true might of that race is not what common folk can understand."

"As it happens, I was intending to meet an elder of the Crystal race to begin with," said Lex. "He told me to meet him in a city known as Valesco. Do you have any idea where it might be?"

"I'm sorry, we Trellops do not usually care much for things outside of our own territories. I do not know the land. You are better off asking one of your human leaders."

The fish, before it went away, extended a small brown root and broke it off, before handing it to Lex.

"If you encounter any Trellops on your way, show them this. So long as you do not threaten them in any way, they will not cause you any trouble. In fact, not only will they avoid causing trouble, they will even go out of their way to assist in your travels."

Lex observed the small root and couldn't really determine what was so special about it, but he kept it anyway.

After saying that, Toro swam away, not really bothering to keep Lex company. He was clearly very disturbed by the news.

Lex, too, saw no reason to delay so he began returning towards the Inn, this time with a bit more urgency. Instead of walking calmly on the seabed, which his ridiculous weight and small frame made so easy, he swam to speed up.

When he eventually reached Babylon, he attracted a bit more attention coming out of the water than he did going in, but no one really bothered to question him.

When he returned to the tavern, he was ready to send one of the workers to go and call Jolene from her residence, but discovered that there was an unusually jovial mood at the tavern.

There was an entire group of mildly intoxicated men, singing and dancing on the stage while the onlookers played music by slamming their tables in synchronization with one another. The triplets were busy serving more drinks, and even they could not contain the grins on their faces.

"What's going on?" Lex asked Roan, the barkeep who was efficiently pouring out drinks without spilling a single drop.

"I think it'll be best if you ask Big Ben," he replied, a soft smile even on his face.

Curious, Lex immediately scanned the tavern and discovered that Big Ben too was dancing and singing, but with a whole host of people on the rooftop terrace!

As the 'security' of the facility, he was usually up front, but today he was the farthest possible from his post.

"What are we all celebrating?" he asked when he finally reached the top. Unfortunately, due to his excellent senses and sharp hearing, the surprise was already spoiled for him, but he still pretended not to know. Still, there was a smile on his face.

"Betty's expecting!" the man roared, drunkenly! "The doctor said so. It's official!"

Lex's smile widened and he grabbed the man by the shoulder, making sure he didn't fall over.

"Congratulations man! Where is she? I want to congratulate her too."

Big Ben erupted into a roar of laughter upon being asked the question, and when he was finally able to stop he managed to say, "she's still at the hospital fighting! She said she won't come back until she finds a doctor who will tell her it's okay to drink while she's expecting."

Lex smiled weakly as concern suddenly filled him.

"Do not worry, I'll talk to Roan. We'll give her the best tea during this time. She won't miss drinking at all."

Big Ben was too busy laughing to hear what Lex said, so he left him to his party. Suddenly a thought occurred to him. Was he supposed to reprimand Ben for drinking on the job?

Shaking his head, he quickly returned to the ground floor to pass out his instructions. For reasons he couldn't fully understand, he suddenly felt quite protective of Big Ben and Betty.

Since they were a part of the Midnight family, he would take great care of them. That also included... not letting this realm get destroyed.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 648: Simple things

Lex was sitting in silence inside the private room, tapping his index finger on the armrest of his sofa. The sound of singing and merrymaking could faintly be heard from outside, though that was only because Lex left the door slightly open. After all the harrowing experiences everyone in this tavern went through, it was a wonder they could still celebrate like this.

But at the same time, it was because they had all gone through such tough times together that they were so close.

Lex too, had to admit that he felt a special bond for all these people who had been beside him during his very stressful time of being stuck away from the Inn. It was for that specific reason that he was feeling slightly stressed right now.

He did not know much about his surrounding areas, and how far his destination was. To curb that, he had begun asking the locals a bit about the neighboring states or towns, or anything else that they knew of.

Most of them had very limited knowledge. They all lived in the area controlled by the Noel family all their lives, and at most knew the names of neighboring nobles and their states.

They had no idea regarding any information relating to other nations at all. He somewhat missed the highly advanced Hum nation and the academy. There, a simple search on their local portal was all it would have taken to get all the information he needed.

Lex's expressions stirred as he heard a familiar voice in the main hall, and turned to look at the door. A few moments later, the door was opened by Rick, who was followed by a few people.

Jolene was naturally among them, for he wanted to see if his instincts reacted to her. As it happened, Bertram Noel was also there. This was great, for Lex had also extended an invitation to him. Lex was hoping to learn how he could make his way to the Crystal nation through him. Surely he would know more, right? But there was a third, unexpected person there as well.

The young and slightly tanned woman bore a strong resemblance to Jolene, but unlike her smiling mother she wore a very stern and serious expression. This was, no doubt, the daughter Jolene wanted Lex to work with in the planning of Jasmine's and Pvarti's wedding.

He only gave her a cursory glance before turning his attention back to the other two.

"Jolene, Bertram, I'm glad you both could make it," said Lex as he stood up to greet them. Naturally he put on his best smile, and did not let any of his internal concerns show on his face.

"It's no trouble at all," said Jolene, her eyes fixed on Lex with a feverish gaze. "Besides, I was planning on visiting you soon anyway. I have to introduce my daughter, and our soon to be liaison for the wedding preparations. This is Jess, one of my most hardworking and accomplished daughters."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Lex said politely, and Jess only nodded in return. It seemed like for liaison, she wasn't exactly very talkative. But that suited Lex just fine, so it did not matter. Especially since Lex wanted to keep as much of a distance from Jolene as possible. After she and her family had discovered the Midnight Inn, Jolene had become almost fanatical in her admiration for Lex. It was quite a nuisance, even when he was merely dealing with her using a projection.

"Unfortunately, Jess' arrival also means it is time for me to leave. We have decided the date for the wedding. It will be held in 6 months exactly, and there are too many matters for us to deal with to make it happen on such short notice."

"Will you be traveling a lot during this time?" Lex asked, genuinely curious. The person who he truly wanted to converse with was Aegis, but that fellow had disappeared for a while. Let alone the tavern, he was not even showing up at the Inn so there was no way for Lex to ask him for any routes. The next best option was naturally Jolene, for her family was deeply connected to the rulers of Hum nation. The best option after that was the Noel family - probably.

"Yes, unfortunately, familial affairs are the most complicated. A lot of our guests need to be invited personally, and certain matters and deals need to be taken care of during this time as well. We will even need to pay a visit to the Hum nation and inform the royal family about the wedding. Being a parent is truly... too complicated."

"Won't that take too long? How will you reach the Hum nation from here?"

"For ordinary people, it would indeed take quite a while," informed Bertram. "But the influence of the nations extends even beyond their own borders. Even though these lands are far away from the empires, separated by vast oceans and extremely inhospitable lands, many nobles have short and long range teleportation formations within their territories. Anyone bearing a token of one of the nation's royal families can use those formations at will."

This was both good and bad news. The good news was that there were apparently many teleportation formations he could possibly access, but the bad news was that the distance between Babylon and the nations seemed to be great.

"What if I wanted to send someone on an errand? Do you think they could get access to those formations?"

Bertram paused, and an awkward look appeared on his face. It seemed like he was not anticipating such a question. As far as he knew, Lex was not as simple as he made it appear on the surface. Not only was he himself an incredible powerhouse, pretending to be a weakling, but he also had the backing of the mysterious Midnight Inn. He did not want to offend Lex by giving him an answer he might not like, but...

"Oh yes, of course! Why not?" exclaimed Jolene as she suddenly saw an opportunity. From her spatial ring, she summoned a large bronze token which had a pickaxe engraved across its front. As far as emblems went, a pickaxe was not a prestigious symbol, but it was most befitting the Phillip clan which was allowed to mine Ethereum under the royal family's command.

"Although this is not the same as a token from the royal family of the Hum nation, this is a token of my Phillips family. It may not get you the same kind of service, but it will definitely enable you to access the teleportation formations. Unfortunately, you will not be exempt from paying for the use. I would give you the royal family's token if I could, but I am not really allowed to give it out - you understand."

"No need, this is already a great help," said Lex, accepting the token. Although she harbored ulterior motives in helping him, Lex wouldn't deny help that he needed.

"You... you aren't the one who has to go on a trip, right?" Jolene suddenly asked, as if it just occurred to her. "If you are, I can send along an escort..."

"No, no, no need," Lex said, doing his best to keep his lip from twitching. "I will be here, making sure everything is in order for the upcoming wedding. But, I have to send someone on a rather urgent task all the way to the Crystal nation, to a city called Valesco. Would you happen to know where it is?"

Even before the duo had the opportunity to answer, he felt like he got an answer. Both Bertram and Jolene had a change in their expression, though they swiftly controlled themselves. Still, Lex felt like he could detect shock and fear from them.

"The path to the Crystal nation from here is different from the one to the Hum nation. The formations will not be enough to send you on your way, and you will have to cross certain areas yourself. It's... it's not really an easy path. I will consult my father and have a map drawn for you to help your... your helper on his journey. But while I can help you find your way to the Crystal nation, finding your way to Valesco... I think only someone from the Crystal race can help you with that."

"Why is that?" Lex asked, curious.

"That... well, technically I cannot even confirm if what I know is true. But there are rumors that... the Crystal race has a massive prison where they punish members of their race who have committed unforgivable crimes. A prison... so old that no one is sure when it was made, filled with immortal prisoners too dangerous to ever be allowed free again, yet kept alive because killing them is too light of a punishment. The name of that prison... is Valesco."

Despite his resilience, Lex sighed. Why were things never just simple?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 649: Ash

The conversation with the dua about the distance to the Crystal nation did not last too long. Unlike the other races, which had a clear positive or negative relationship with one another, the Crystal race equally shunned all the other races. They kept their territories closed, and did not usually bother much with the outside world.

That did not mean that no one was allowed to enter their nation - just that they were extremely selective in who entered. In a way, one would have to prove themselves worthy of interacting with the crystal race.

The duo mentioned nothing about that, for they assumed that Lex already had some kind of relationship with the Crystal race if he was heading over, and they were technically correct.

Lex did not have much else to discuss with Bertram, as the man had already promised to provide Lex with a map leading to his destination.

That would have to suffice for now, though the two were still being very vague about how far the nation was. That was Lex's next great concern. The Crystal realm was as big as the entire solar system, and if the distance between him and his destination was equal to the distance between planets, it would take forever to reach! He could only hope there were enough teleportation formations.

He did, however, have something left to discuss with Jolene, and even Jess! Fortunately, it appeared as though Jolene knew about it and on her own requested that they 'have a word in private'.

Lex manipulated space and created a separate 'room' around the two of them, putting up opaque barriers so that no one could lip read what they were about to discuss.

"Are you satisfied with the results of your request?" Lex asked, without waiting for her to broach the topic. It was as if he already knew what she was going to talk about.

A random stranger had left a box with unknown contents at the tavern, with the hope to use the place as a drop off point for certain items, allowing Jolene to take the box at a later date. It was a discreet way

of passing along whatever it is she wanted delivered, as she would never actually cross paths with whoever was delivering the package.

At first, she had only left a package at the Inn for 3 days, testing to see if the tavern was capable of isolating its aura. Once she discovered that it actually could, she had the real package delivered to the tavern to collect it herself later.

All of this was fine, as far as Lex was concerned. Or at least, it would have been normally. The fact that it seemed like Lex was aiding and abetting in probably illegal, or at least highly suspicious behavior did not phase him. What got to him was the fact that the aura from Jolene's package... was extremely repulsive!

The box she had left at the Inn to test if the aura leaked already disgusted Lex, even though he had no idea what it contained. The actual package itself was even worse. Technically speaking, Lex's real body had not been here when the package was delivered and received, but even the aura it left behind was so strong that Lex was still disgusted by it when he felt it.

Whatever the package was, illegal or not, he decided he no longer wanted to facilitate it. Although the purpose of the Inn and tavern was to host all guests equally without discrimination, Lex was not a mindless slave of the system's directives. Since it was disgusting to him, he no longer wanted a part in it.

"Extremely," Jolene stated with a massive smile. "You do not know how much you have helped me with this."

"I'm glad you are satisfied with our service," Lex said with a soft smile. "That is also why I feel extremely regretful to inform you that the tavern will not be able to help you in such an endeavor in the future."

Jolene was genuinely startled, as she was not expecting such an answer, especially since the previous exchange had gone off without a hitch.

"Can... can I ask why?" she asked hesitantly. She did not forget Lex's powerful aura, so she was hesitant to get on his bad side. Yet at the same time, this task was genuinely too important to her to let go of so easily.

"Rest assured, you did not break any rules of the tavern, and so there will be no effect on any other services you acquire from the tavern. But the matter of fact is, while I usually do not interfere in the matters of guests, the aura of the item you exchanged was... I found it too revolting. I did not investigate its contents, for I thoroughly respect the privacy of all my guests, but I cannot, in good conscience, continue to facilitate this exchange."

A hint of fear appeared on Jolene's face, despite the fact that Lex said he did not investigate the contents. This was an extremely sensitive matter, which she could not risk exposing, but at the same time could not give up either. Since Lex did not want to help out anymore, she would have to figure out another way.

"Please do not misunderstand," she explained while smiling weakly. "My... 'transactions' are not what they might appear to be. These are related to an extremely important issue that needs resolving. But since you do not want to facilitate them anymore, I will not bother you with them anymore. Not that it matters, as I am scheduled to depart soon anyway."

They talked a bit more while Lex ensured that he was not drawing any conclusions about her affairs, and simply did not want to participate in this particular one anymore.

Once they were done, Lex removed the barriers, ending their private conversation.

"I'll leave you and Jess to it," Jolene suddenly said, standing up. "There are countless matters relating to the wedding to get to, so there's no doubt you two will be holed up together for quite a while."

Amazingly, Jolene was completely back to her normal self, returning to her antics of trying to set up Lex with her daughter!

"I wish I could stay and help, but I just dropped by to introduce you to Jess. She can get in contact with me at any time, and if for some reason she can't, she knows full well what to do for the wedding."

Jess, with an extremely serious face, nodded, as if accepting a task that would determine the life or death of millions.

But while Lex joked in his mind, he was unaware that this wedding really would be such an affair. The interest of the nation, and thereby any family connected to its interests, determined the life or death of billions on the regular.

"I'm sure our cooperation will bear fruitful results. Believe it or not, I'd say I'm more invested in making this wedding a success than even you."

Jolene smiled at Lex's remark, but she was unaware that he really did care more about it than anyone else. He was determined to get a SSS+ ranking for this quest!

Once Bertram and Jolene departed, Lex was left alone with Jess who silently stared at him. Rather than feel like an awkward silence was building, Lex felt relieved. If she was as determined as her mother in her ulterior motive Lex would find this matter quite problematic to handle, but since she wasn't, things would be simple.

"Although we have six months until the wedding, I don't think we should waste a single moment," said Lex with a warm and confident smile. "Do you?"

Before Jess had an opportunity to reply, Lex stood up and opened the door to the private room, waving at Roan to send someone in.

As soon as he got this quest, he had delegated a lot of research tasks to the planning division, and even asked Mary to look up the best wedding consultants they could find - not to mention conduct extensive research on Indian wedding culture. What he did not expect to learn was that there was such an expert within his own planning division. The moment he learned about her, he decided to bring her to the Crystal realm and have her help out.

A tall, caramel skinned woman walked with, dressed quite casually instead of the usual formalwear associated with the Inn. Yet even in a T-shirt and pants, she looked stunning - though one should not expect less from a worker at the Inn.

"This is an expert I've called in who will be handling a lot of the wedding preparations. Since you'll be working closely together, why don't you guys introduce yourselves?"

The woman from the planning division looked at Jess, and gave her a soft, welcoming smile as if she was looking forward to working together.

"Hi Jess," she said, her voice calm yet confident. "My name is Aishwarya-Rai, but my friends call me Ash. It's a pleasure to meet you."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 650: Warm up

Jess was startled by everything that had happened, especially since she had been informed by her mother that she would be working closely with Lex. Jess was a perfectionist, so any task she did, she did with the aim of achieving perfection. This was both a boon and a flaw.

On one hand, everything she did achieved perfection, catapulting her reputation not only amongst her own family, but the general public as well. On the other hand, she barely ever ended up doing anything, because the more matters she picked up, the less time she would have to achieve perfection in each one.

For this upcoming wedding, she had started working the absolute moment she heard about it. In fact, to aid her in achieving the best possible task, she even asked her family to compile an extensively detailed file on the Midnight tavern so she could research it thoroughly.

She had, in her opinion, perfectly worked out Lex's personality, and mentally prepared herself accordingly so that they could achieve maximum efficiency in attaining results. As for her mother's wish for them to fall in love with each other, she knew nothing. After all, her one-track mind could not handle multiple projects at the same time.

But from the very start, a wrench had been thrown into her plans! Who was this Ash? Where did she come from? She was not in the file Jess had studied! Moreover, why did it seem like Lex was transferring his responsibilities to others?

"The pleasure is mine," Jess said, shaking Ash's hand. But then she immediately turned to Lex and said, "when you say we'll be working closely together, do you mean that you won't be the one handling the wedding preparations?"

Lex smiled. Since he knew Jolene was setting some kind of love trap for him, why would he be stupid enough to stay put? Of course the first thing he did was look for someone to take his place. But he was not just shirking his duties - he had grander plans for the wedding than anyone knew, and only he could fulfill them.

"Yes and no," he said. "You and Ash will be handling the normal sequence of events and handle the bulk of the tasks. But that does not mean I won't be doing anything. You may not know this, but Pvarti and I are old friends, so naturally I want to make this wedding amazing as well. As such, I will be handling a special task which, if I succeed in, will take this wedding up by another level."

Jess looked skeptical, but Lex was sincere. From the moment he had received this quest, he had been thinking about how he could make it worthy of an SSS+ ranking. Having over the top theatrics was, of course, necessary, but that would not be enough.

Lex had some experience in completing quests with extremely high rankings, but each time it was more to do with luck than his own performance. Whether it was the appearance of two Demi-Daolords, or an actual Daolord, it was not something he could have anticipated or arranged.

But the experience had taught him something. Although his quests may seem random, they all were ultimately linked to the Midnight Inn. As an Inn, one of the most prideful things was that important or powerful guests made an appearance.

There were probably more layers involved in determining his quest ranking, but it could not be denied that that was a major one. As such, Lex had been thinking along the lines of who he could invite to make this wedding the best or most prestigious.

Originally he was thinking that Aegis would have to do, but now he had a better idea. The realm itself was being destroyed. If Lex could reach the Crystal race in time, and convince them of what was happening, he could use his vast experience in manipulating... eh, he meant his vast experience in persuading people to have the Crystal race treat this wedding as a kind of conference.

If a simple wedding between two human nobles ended up inviting the leaders of all the nations in this realm, he would consider that as an excellent wedding.

He did not know if such a thing would be enough, or if he could even pull it off, but for now that was the best plan he had.

Jess tried asking Lex what he had planned, and convincing him to once again take over planning, but he would not listen. Since he was planning on leaving anyway, he would only be here in the form of his projection anyway. As such, he was only planning on handling and resolving emergencies. His entire personal focus would be on reaching the Crystal empire.

He hoped he could reach it in enough time to set up the meeting with everyone, and make it back as well.

The following day, or, well, 24 hours later since the concept of day and night was screwed up here, Bertram returned to the Inn and handed Lex a leather scroll.

This was not at all what Lex was expecting when he had been told he was getting a map, but it would have to do. Instead of detailing the entire terrain and surrounding areas, the 'map' just listed a path using prominent landmarks as markers. It would have to suffice.

With everything in hand, Lex departed from Babylon, making sure not to be spotted as he did. After all, he was supposed to be inside the tavern this entire time.

After a solid 6 hours of running at his top speed, Lex finally stopped and pulled out the map. Fortunately, other than visual markers, the map also recorded auras and spiritual markers which Lex could track using his spirit sense and intuition. Or better yet...

He summoned Fenrir, who was sleeping, and woke up the pup. He climbed onto its back, and held out the map for it to sniff.

"Follow these auras," Lex told the excited little wolf. "Think of this as... we're going on a long walk, through an endless park, filled with monsters and unknown dangers. Also, we're on a time limit so you better run fast."

Fenrir howled in excitement and began running! Every word Lex had said excited it more than the last!

A single spaceship was moving through space, unbothered by the much larger ships nearby. Each battlefield with the Fuegan was different, in many ways. The battlefield in which Alexander had fought was artificially created, and seemed like an endless plane. This one, which the Midnight Battalion was being brought through, consisted of an unusual region of space enveloped by a cosmic cloud.

Normal cosmic clouds were vast regions of space containing gas, dust and other small particles which brought about the appearance of a cloud. Yet this one not only contained hundreds of rogue planets, it also contained currents of chaos energy - a form of extremely concentrated spiritual energy that not even normal immortals could handle.

The interference from the chaos energy made it so that the actual contents of this cosmic cloud had been hidden from millions of years, serving as a breeding ground for Fuegan forces.

When it was finally discovered, it naturally suffered an all out assault. The rogue planet that the Midnight Battalion was being taken to was an extremely volatile, yet extremely important one!

According to the briefing Luthor got, the planet had some extremely valuable resources that were hard to find in entire galaxies, so taking control of the planet was of the highest priority. Yet the planet also had an unstable core, so it could not tolerate fights between higher level cultivators. Moreover, bombarding it from space was also out of the equation, because that would not only risk further destabilizing it, but also risk destroying the resources.

The man briefing Luthor made it very clear that to the leaders of this war, those resources were a lot more valuable than all of their lives, so he better perform well. The reason they were being led to such an important site as their first deployment was due to their excellent rating and performance. It seemed... that the Battalion had developed a reputation without even setting foot on the battlefield.

Of course, to Luthor, none of that mattered. He was indifferent to his superiors' purposes and reasoning. He simply didn't care. His one and only objective was to ensure that no one from the Inn died.

As the spaceship approached the planet, Luthor looked out at it from one of the screens projecting the outside, then turned to his comrades.

"Once, when I was talking to one of the Inn's oldest guests, I heard him say something extremely profound."

Luthor did not raise his voice, but it carried to everyone in the room, attracting their attention.

"He said the best defense, the best way to protect yourself, is to kill your enemies before they have a chance to attack."

He paused, and looked at the 'soldiers' from the Inn.

"Within one month, I want the planet wiped of all hostiles. That will be our warm up for this war. Let's go."