

Innkeeper 651

The Innkeeper

Chapter 651: Boring

The ship carrying all the soldiers did not land on the planet. In fact, it did not even enter the atmosphere, for the planet was infested with hordes of mindless yet violent aliens. They were one of the many species that had been bred especially for wars against planets.

The Fuegan were, in fact, not the first to use such tactics, though currently they were the ones employing it the most in the origin realm.

The concept was simple. Once any civilization reached a certain level, and grew enough, they would gain the means of genetic manipulation, whether through technology or spiritual techniques or something else. With such advancements, there naturally came military applications.

Although uncommon, when larger civilizations wage war against one another, it is often too intensive on 'human' resources to invade each and every planet or strategic location. They would create fast-reproducing aliens to overpower or weaken the planet's inhabitants. Through long lasting wars of attrition, the planet was usually either overwhelmed, or was at the very least greatly weakened, all without the ones responsible putting in any real effort.

Of course, the perpetrators themselves naturally retained the means to combat this engineered alien species in case they ever needed to take the planet themselves.

There were many ways of managing this was circumnavigating the Henali prohibition on genocide, such as the case with the devils and zombies. Of course, in the case of the Fuegan, there was no need to care for any prohibitions or rules at all.

They populated the planet with extremely vicious creatures which were designed to not only tear apart any living thing, but the planet as well. That was also one of the reasons the planet was so fragile.

Once the ship got into position, all the soldiers were instructed to get into their launch pods. Besides those from the Midnight Inn, there were countless other teams as well, all of them much bigger than the Midnight Battalion. After all, regardless of how powerful or effective the Midnight Battalion might seem,

it was just stupid to send 1000 soldiers to clear out an entire planet. Each team being sent to this planet, though, was considered elite.

Luthor couldn't have cared less about that, though. With an impassive face, as if he was bored, he climbed into his pod, after which support technicians came in and ensured he was properly strapped in.

Hundreds of thousands of pods were launched all over the planet's surface. The aliens on the planet noticed the rain, and tried shooting the pods out of the sky, but they came equipped with safety measures.

Like hail of metal instead of ice, the pods crashed into the ground and spread devastation wherever they landed, despite the fact that the ship had come as close as possible for launch.

When the pods opened, the soldiers who were completely safe climbed out. They had only a short while to reorient themselves and get used to the conditions on this planet before the aliens would attack them. But while everyone was gearing up and getting in position to defend, the Midnight Battalion attacked.

It could not be helped. Luthor, as well as the rest, were born in the clean and pristine environment of the Inn, yet now they were exposed to the polluted and stale air of this rogue planet. Although their masks had filtration functions, it was a pale imitation of what they were used to. They were irritated and uncomfortable. Fortunately, there were targets nearby to help them vent their frustrations.

All around the pods, where most of the soldiers were waiting to make their first stand, sounds of distant growls and the thumping and stomping of approaching beasts could be heard. Well, all around them except one direction, where Z was warming up his speakers with a soft and tempered melody titled 'Enter Sandwoman'.

Astride Fenrir, Lex was traversing the land with incredible speed. A part of him wanted to believe that if he had been running on his own two legs, he could have still maintained such speed. He couldn't be blamed for thinking like this, as he boasted greater physical strength and resilience than Fenrir. Even given the situation where he could replace the pups' sheer excitement and joy at being allowed to run

so fast and freely for so long, with nothing but discipline, the one thing even he had to admit that he couldn't replicate was the tranquility of their journey.

The pup boasted great stealth capabilities, Lex always knew that. But after a certain time, Lex realized that Fenrir wasn't actively being stealthy - it was ingrained into his very nature. If Lex had been running at the same speed, massive craters would be left in the ground with each step he took. The roaring wind would herald his arrival wherever he passed, much like the sound of a jet was usually heard even as it had already passed the area by.

Yet as Fenrir passed, not only was not a single blade of grass disturbed, there was barely even any sound. Lex watched in wonder as the duo actually passed by a few animals walking in the wild, completely unaware as they passed them by.

If Lex didn't know for sure that Fenrir couldn't do that, he might have started to believe that they were invisible.

Yet even as they traveled at incredible speeds and never took a break, even hours later they were still far from just their first destination. They were heading towards the capital of the Noel family's territory, from where they would take a teleportation formation and continue on their path. Lex was sure they were heading in the right direction, for they kept consulting the map, but as the map did not denote the distances, there was no way of knowing when they would reach.

This journey he was expecting to be tense and fraught with danger... ended up just being a long stretch of uneventful traveling - at least so far.

Ten more hours later, when they still had not reached their destination and it was nowhere in sight, Lex gave up. This was too boring. Back at the emporium when he heard about that spaceship which could easily travel even between galaxies, Lex had been impressed but did not think he needed such a thing. Now he knew he was wrong. He should look into getting himself a similar ship for long distance travel as well. The only issue was that transporting such a massive thing to and from the Inn was a problem. He would look into finding a ship that can easily fit into his spatial bangle.

Until then, he had to fill his time with something else, so he used his Remote presence ability to project an image of himself at the Inn.

It had been a long time since he hosted some guests himself as the Innkeeper. It might be interesting if he did that for a while after all this time.

Technically he could use this time productively and actually work, but after so much boredom he did not feel like working.

A scan of the Inn revealed that all was more or less normal. The absence of some of the most notable faces at the Inn had not gone unnoticed, yet he had strictly ordered not to reveal any information to the public. All anyone who asked was told that they had gone somewhere for special training.

Besides that, the focus of the guests seemed to be on the event of the week that was going on. Various performers and artists had been invited from multiple planets to have live shows. While earth was no longer in a position where anyone could focus on such things, some of the refugees participated. Besides that, a lot of participants from the other planets that were linked to the Inn came as well.

In fact, from X-142 there was actually a musical band consisting of all fairies. The tiny stars were unusually popular, though Lex had to admit their music was quite catchy.

As Lex was observing the event, and all the guests, his sight eventually focused on two teenagers. A short yet plump boy was accompanied by a taller yet skinnier girl. The faint resemblance in their appearance hinted that they were related. They were dressed oddly, with clothes that looked like they had been worn in sections. For example, the shirt - or whatever was covering their torso - actually consisted of 7 small bits of fabric which had to be worn one at a time. The same kind of clothing was also on their arms and legs.

Yet strange as it was, they were not showing much skin, and by the way that the two held themselves up, Lex got the feeling that they were dressed formally rather than casually, at least according to their own standards.

"There's too much of a crowd here," the girl complained as she looked at the crowded Main street. "Whoever sold us the keys lied to us. How is this a relaxing spot for a vacation?"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 652: Work

The 'sun' hung low in the evening sky, painting the Inn in a warm hue. There were a few scattered clouds here and there, but instead of making the Inn seem dull and gray, they made the Inn seem light and airy.

Fresh snow would fall wherever the clouds traveled, though somehow the roads and walking paths stayed miraculously clean. Of course, if anyone tread off the fixed path, their footsteps would be accompanied by the satisfying crunch of stepping in the powdery snow.

As if to match the mood set by the environment, the usual energetic buzz of the crowd of Main street had changed to hushed murmurs.

Though most of the guests did not really need to do so, they were dressed in warm coats and comfy scarves, and carried cups of hot cocoa or coffee or tea wherever they went. Some guests even walked around with large wooden mugs of warm mead, while others munched on fresh, steaming chicken patties, veggie rolls or dough balls.

Though there was no music playing, the ambience of Main street itself resulted in a soft melody that made one seem both cold and warm at the same time.

Yet amidst this coziness, the two teenagers seemed malcontent. While for some, the simple or mundane things such as enjoying an ordinary snow day was quite pleasing, for the energetic and rebellious teenagers it was not enough. They were young and spirited, and were not yet at the stage of life where such subtle things could trigger nostalgia or melancholy.

Or, if one were to simply take it at the words of the girl, they simply wanted a place where they could enjoy solitude. The crowds and hustle and bustle of a busy street left them tense and agitated, unable to relax.

"Excuse me, dear guests. I don't mean to intrude, but I could not help but overhearing that you are unsatisfied with this place," said Lex, as he teleported his projection behind the two.

The kids, much to their credit, were not at all startled by Lex suddenly appearing behind them. Moreover, when they looked at him, there was no significant emotion in their eyes, as if everything they saw or experienced was mundane.

"My sister and I came here to get away for a while," the boy explained. "A traveling merchant sold the key to us and told us that the key would take us somewhere relaxing, where we could have a vacation while our parents worked. But this... ugh."

The boy seemed too disgusted to finish his sentence. Although Lex did not show it, he was subtly taken aback by the children's reaction. If nothing else, almost everyone who visited the Inn would at least enjoy the purity of the spiritual energy. Just that in itself was clearly enough to put everyone in a good mood.

Lex was no longer as ignorant as before. By reading a lot of 'general knowledge' available of the Henali portal as well as from documents provided by the emporium, he knew a lot more about 'star ranks'.

It was not a term used only by the Inn, and in fact was a generic unit used across the entire Origin realm. The star rank denoted the energy concentration in any given area. When the unit was first created, it was called star rank because usually in a star system, it was the level of the local star which would affect the quantity and quality of energy in its surrounding planet. But the fact that rogue planets, minor realms, random asteroid belts and even seemingly empty patches of the realm had varying levels of energy, it was then simply used to denote the energy level of a given area.

In fact, Lex had even learned about the various kinds and qualities of spiritual energies that existed in the universe, and why different energies resulted in different star ranks. The simple version of it was that a higher energy level may not always be better, and a lower energy level may not be a bad thing. The good and bad aspects of energy levels all depended on one's cultivation level. Fortunately that was not a concern at the Midnight Inn, for even if the energy level was too high for certain guests, the Inn would automatically ensure that it would not interact with them, and instead the Inn would surround those guests with the optimal energy levels for them.

Long story short, almost everyone who came to the Inn enjoyed the pleasant sensation provided by a purer and cleaner environment. After all, the average star rank across the realm was 1 star. Yet the kids did not seem to care at all. It was as if this was ordinary, or even the most basic requirement which they did not even need to think about.

"I understand that the crowded atmosphere of Main street does not suit your tastes. How about we go elsewhere and discuss how you can best enjoy the Inn."

Lex snapped his fingers, and teleported the three to a cabin atop the Midnight Mountain. There was a small clearing where the view from one side was the bustling village, while on another side stood the

magnificent Mountain man, in his seemingly endless slumber. The murmurs of the street had disappeared, giving way to the sound of the wind, traveling over the snow covered trees.

There was a sharp contrast to the busy street, yet somehow Lex knew that even this would not satisfy the children. If it were so easy, they would not have remained unimpressed even at the Main street. That is why, to begin with, he only said they were coming here to discuss what they can do.

And indeed, the children remained nonreactive after teleporting here. They looked around at their new environment, as if to inspect it, yet not much else. Lex could not help but want to learn more about them, so he scanned them.

Name: Khuno Ekkeko

Age: 13

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Qi training peak

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Lycanthrope

Remarks: Please refrain from teleporting away random children - this is not that kind of system!

Name: Cava Ekkeko

Age: 16

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Foundation realm peak

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Lycanthrope

Remarks: Please be warned, another instance of teleporting minors will result in a complaint to the intergalactic police!

The fact that Khuno was already a cultivator even before turning 15 said a lot about his background. Humans would need special kinds of medicinal fruits and herbs which would prepare their bodies to cultivate ahead of time. Of course, there was also a chance that their bloodline had something to do with their ability to cultivate.

"Better," said Khuno, "but there doesn't seem like there's much to do here."

"I concur," Cava chimed in. "Just because we are on vacation it does not mean we can lay around sleeping and doing nothing. What actual, productive and fruitful work is there for us to do here? Just because we want a break from the stress of day to day life does not mean we can afford to just lounge around."

Lex was... intrigued by the challenge these kids were presenting. He could naturally tell that they were not being petulant, and instead genuinely could not comprehend not doing some work. Perhaps for them not dealing with whatever they had to endure on a daily basis was already a vacation, so they did not need other events to excite or stimulate them. Instead, they want something productive to do to occupy their minds, while still giving them the feeling of having used their time productively.

Truthfully, Lex could not understand people who had such views about relaxing, but it was true that people who were too used to being productive could not stand wasting time. The Midnight Inn had to cater to all kinds of guests, not just the convenient ones, so Lex genuinely took this up as a challenge.

"Why don't you tell me a little about what you imagine your vacation being like? That way, I can recommend some of the Inns activities or services for you to enjoy."

Khuno shrugged and said, "I don't know. I've never had a vacation. What about you?"

"Me neither," said Cava.

Lex smiled warily. Since they had no experience, having them enjoy their vacation was both easy and difficult. The only real thing that would determine which of those two it would end up being was Lex's marketing skills.

"I have the perfect idea. Why don't you two give it a try? If you don't like it you can always stop."

The two looked at each other and shrugged, coming to some kind of agreement.

"Excellent."

He teleported them over to a new district of the greenhouse, and passed a few instructions to the turtle.

"I'm sending you over a couple of new volunteers. Have them work the newly created cold desert, and ensure they finish planting all the new vegetables. Remember, we have only 6 months to prepare the best produce for the upcoming wedding, so we have to plant the best possible stuff."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 653: 300

Khuno and Cava were teleported once again, this time finding themselves in a cold and barren land. Due to the fact that they were cultivators, the chill didn't negatively affect them, but it was a lot more biting here than even the snowy mountain they were on before.

Every breath they took in felt biting cold, yet to them it was just reinvigorating rather than uncomfortable. Every breath they exhaled left a long, thick trail of mist.

Yet somehow, besides their misty breath, and the chill running down their spines, there was no other sign of the pervading cold in the surrounding area. There was no snow or ice anywhere to be found. The only sight for them to see was the dried yet grainy soil, and the gray and beige pebbles and rocks littered throughout the area. There wasn't even any vegetation.

If they did not know better, they would assume that they had been sent to some kind of wasteland or deserted area.

Yet as deplorable as the conditions seemed, the children actually seemed to like it - a little. Their bloodlines inevitably affected their behavior and thought process, even if it was indirectly. What this actually meant was that they felt nice and cozy in cold climates, and would be more irritable in warm climates due to the fact that their bodies innately stayed warm.

Now it wasn't their bloodline forcing them to behave irritably in the heat and relaxed in the cold, yet due to the physical feedback of their bodies, they naturally developed such behavior.

This was only one of the simpler and easily identified idiosyncrasies that their family shared. Another one was their usually serious attitude, not to mention their extreme focus on any task or objective. Sure, there were some oddballs in their family here and there, but that was not the norm.

As such, these two who were out on vacation did not really know how to enjoy or behave, and could only think to keep themselves busy somehow. Yet what could there possibly be for them to do in this frozen wasteland?

As if to answer their question, a dark figure appeared in the distance, approaching them. Its movements seemed to be slow, yet the actual speed at which it arrived was surprisingly fast. Moreover, even from a distance, the figure was radiating a dominating and commanding aura - one that their bloodline was reacting to!

That genuinely surprised them, for they had never encountered such a situation. Normally, even if they faced a much stronger creature, their bloodline would only make them more aggressive and ready to

put up a fight. This was confirmed by their mother, who had once been in the presence of a dragon - though fortunately for them she did not have to fight it, Yet now, their bloodline was cowering! How was this possible?

Before the kids could fully wrap their heads around the submission emanating from within their very bones, the figure arrived.

It belonged to a turtle, or at least something that resembled a turtle. Its body was massive, causing them to have to crane their neck up to look at its face. A single, curved, gray horn protruded from its forehead, though streaks of purple had begun appearing on it.

"Oh dear, more silly humans," the turtle lamented, though it did not seem too disturbed. Its eternal fondness for picking up strays gave it a very tolerant and mellow personality. And yes, to it, humans were just more strays or pets for it to collect and raise. After all, hadn't it also rescued and protected Lex when he first came to Nibiru? To it, Lex was and still is no different from Little Blue and the rest.

The children, who were finally showing some expression, looked up in awe and reverence. Lex, who was spying on the situation from the Midnight mountain, did not know if he should feel satisfied that he finally broke through and impressed them, or offended that the turtle had elicited such a reaction but not himself.

"I have been told that you little humans want to farm. I will bring you some saplings and teach you how to plant them in this environment."

"What are we planting?" Cava asked, curious.

"And what for?" Khuno asked as well, trying to put up a strong front. He could not accept that his own blood was being submissive before another, and did not want to give in.

"In six months there will be a wedding," the turtle told. "But more importantly, the wedding will also be a conference for immortals. The food that you will plant now will be served at that conference."

"We're growing food for immortals?" the duo asked, startled.

"No silly humans. This is food for others at the conference. The food for the immortals... is being grown by me personally."

After that, the turtle did not bother explaining any further, and used a vine made of grass to pull out a small cactus from within its shell. But the strange thing was that this cactus... seemed to be made of rocks, and the only parts of it which seemed like an ordinary plant were its roots.

The turtle showed the kids how to plant it in the ground, which seemed quite straightforward when the turtle did it. This unusual cactus required that its roots be buried to a minimum depth, and had to be planted in an area with lots of pebbles and rocks.

The process seemed straightforward enough, and growing food for a conference of immortals seemed a worthy enough task for them to put some effort into it. After all, regardless of their background, as mere mortals themselves they still needed to respect immortals.

But when they tried to repeat the process themselves, using tools the turtle had given them, they discovered that the seemingly loose and grainy soil was as tough as metal. They literally could not even scratch the surface.

The kids looked at each other dumbfounded, while the turtle only watched silently from the side. Problem solving was an important skill for its pets to learn, so it would not interfere unless they were completely overwhelmed.

Feeling unresigned, the two tried again, this time using more strength. When they failed again, they tried once more while using spiritual techniques to literally attack the floor. Khuno was still not able to produce any significant results while Cava managed to produce a visible indent in the ground.

The repeated failures did not demotivate them, and instead spurred them to put even more effort into their task. The dua activated their bloodlines, which only produced limited visual changes in the two. Both of them suddenly grew more hair on their bodies, though it was not to the extent that it completely covered their skin, and their eyes turned yellow.

This time, instead of trying separately, they both began hacking at the same point in the ground, working together to produce a single hole.

The process was slow, incredibly slow. But at least it had begun.

The turtle shook its head and went away. From what it could see, the kids were more or less playing around in the dirt.

Far away, Lex snickered as he saw the two working relentlessly to provide him with free labor. That's what they got for acting haughty in front of him. No, eh, wait. He meant the Inn was capable of satisfying the request of any kind of guest.

Feeling somewhat entertained, he decided to continue hosting guests for a while, so for the next few hours, random guests who found themselves in slightly less crowded areas were visited by the Innkeeper, unbeknownst to them. Since he never officially introduced himself, everyone just assumed he was just another worker at the Inn.

Eventually, his fun was interrupted by a system notification - one that he had been waiting for!

The workers that he hired for the Inn now included two races: humans and draconian apostles. From those two races, the humans now had the option of three different bloodlines.

The first bloodline, Regalia Bloom, was considered the default bloodline any of his workers could unlock and did not cost any extra.

The second bloodline, Anachronistic Ignition, which was the one Luthor had, cost 350 million MP per worker to give to a new worker, which was quite a bit more than Regalia Bloom.

The third bloodline, Death Counter, also had a massive price bump, coming out at 300 million MP per worker.

But considering the fact that both the newly unlocked bloodlines were extremely impressive, Lex continued to randomly give them out regardless of the massive cost. Yet once he received a summons to war, he had the idea of hiring a group of workers specifically for combat purposes. It was then that he discovered that besides their massive cost, the newer bloodlines also could not be given out en masse, and it required quite a bit of time to summon workers with these bloodlines if all of them had the newer ones.

Still, Lex was not miserly. He immediately spent 90 billion MP and maxed out his limit to hire 300 workers with the Death Counter bloodline. Once they were trained, they would be his new Midnight Battalion!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 654: Choose to fight

From the time Lex chose to hire the 300 new workers to the time they arrived at the Inn, quite a few days had passed. It had long since become Lex's habit to deeply analyze everything the system did, and compare it to its previous actions to determine patterns.

He never had problems ordering a large number of workers before, and the delivery was usually almost instant. So then what exactly had caused the delay?

He could come up with a few different answers. The first and most obvious answer was, naturally, the bloodline. Death Counter was one of the new bloodlines he unlocked for his employees, and it essentially made the user immortal - more or less.

While it was not nearly as versatile as Regalia Bloom or Anachronistic Ignition, it had one simple use case. The owner of the bloodline could hide a single drop of blood anywhere, and if they were to die, they could use that single drop to come back to life at full health and maximum power.

Of course the actual application of the bloodline ability was slightly more complex than how it was stated, but that was essentially the gist of the bloodline ability. The bloodline could do nothing else, but honestly, wasn't that already enough? When compared to the fact that normal employees did not come with the bloodline unlocked, but only the ability to potentially unlock the Regalia Bloom, the difference could be easily identified.

But while the bloodline was the most obvious reason for why there was a delay, it was not the only one. When hiring new staff, the system allowed Lex to input what kind of role he expected to put them in, after which the system would make them more skilled in related fields. That was not to say that the system could directly control their talents, but that it would give each worker a higher starting point in related fields, making it easier for them to start and master their expected roles.

Normally, Lex would put in a general direction, but would not be too specific so as to allow each worker to develop naturally. Only when he was entering the details for Luthor did Lex end up being extremely specific. Well, this time he had also been very particular in the skills and talents of the new workers. As a result, he may have overdone it a little.

He made each worker extremely gifted physically. He made them all quick learners, with an incredibly quick training time when learning combat. Moreover, he made them all incredibly focused, driven, disciplined and hardworking. This was not to mention that he gave them a solid foundation in biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, statistics and probability, data analysis, pattern recognition, critical thinking and, well, much, much more.

From the very moment they were hired, they knew how to fight, and they knew how to heal. They could construct fortifications, and had the foundation to quickly learn formations to help in offense and defense as well. They could perfectly strategize on how best to assault enemies and enemy strongholds.

In summary, they were pretty cool. But the price of all that 'coolness' might have been their delayed arrival.

Whether the reason for the delay was one of those, neither, or even both, did not really matter. It was enough that Lex took note of the delay for now. In the short while he did not intend on hiring more, for even though he knew it was an important expense, it was also important to take stock of everything as he went along. He could not go around randomly spending 90 billion MP regardless of how much he was earning, or he would quickly end up broke.

So it was best to instead focus on training these new workers. Once, long ago, when Lex had started hiring workers from the system, and had no access to the portal or other organizations, he was forced to rely on the system to get cultivation techniques and spiritual techniques for them from the system.

As convenient as it seemed, it was actually not the best solution. That was because this was only a perfunctory service offered by the system. Once his Midnight Battalion panel started working he assumed he would be able to get more optimal techniques from there, but for now, the Midnight Library would have to do.

Of course, even so, he would not allow them to randomly select techniques from there. As his future frontline force, they had to have the best of the best, while being as lethal as possible. As such, he had Chad, the deputy head of security, work in close coordination with the planning division and come up with a training plan for them. That naturally included what techniques they would train in. Of course,

their own personal preferences would have to be taken into account, but since they were meant to be a battalion, their joint strength mattered a lot more than their individual strength.

"Welcome to the Midnight Inn," he said, solemnly. "Normally, for new initiates of the Inn, the onboarding process is different. But for you all, it is completely different, as the expectations from you are completely different. You have all been chosen as warriors and soldiers, to be the front line of the Midnight Inn against the dangers and threats of the universe. But at the same time, I do not believe in forcing anyone.

"Ahead of you lies extreme danger, and a difficult and uneasy path. As such, if any of you wish to opt out, now is your chance. Think clearly, for you will not get such a chance again. I will not hold it against any of you if you do not wish to follow this path, and will give you another role at the Inn. But, this is your only opportunity so choose wisely. I will give you all some time to think it over before you have to give me your answer. In the meantime, go explore the Inn. Get a deeper understanding of what it is you will be fighting for, if you choose to fight that is."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 655: Don't have a credit card

Although Lex had expressly hired these workers for the purpose of fighting, and they had a bloodline that was for the express purpose of coming back to life, he did not want to force anyone. Even though he said he wouldn't be giving them another chance later on to quit, if one of them really wanted to, Lex would figure something out.

Besides, he had seen enough of the universe to know that anything was possible. Even if they had a bloodline that could revive them, who was to say there wasn't another bloodline out there that could perfectly counter this ability? Since bloodlines were based on laws, what if they encountered an enemy who had a better mastery of the laws that this particular bloodline was based on? Couldn't they theoretically counter, or even control their bloodline?

Lex didn't have the answer to such questions, but he knew that it was best to give them as much choice in this matter as possible.

He stood there and watched as all of his workers dispersed, but was surprised to find that one of the workers still stood there. His arms were folded behind his back, and his head pointed directly forward. His body was still tense, his shoulders locked, chest held out high, as if he was standing at attention. But for all his posturing, his short height and young appearance took away a lot from the intimidating aura he was trying to portray. He looked like another Z.

"Don't you want to go look around?" Lex asked him.

"No sir!" he replied forcefully. "I know what I want, and that is to fight!"

Lex gave the boy's enthusiasm a nod and asked, "what's your name?"

"Leonidas!" the boy replied, his voice still loud and forceful.

"Well then Leonidas, if you're sure of what you want, go find Deputy head Chad and introduce yourself. You'll be spending a lot of time together in the future."

Leonidas saluted Lex, and then marched off stiffly. It was clear that the boy did not know how to actually march, but that would probably change soon. Lex watched the enthusiastic boy for a while, before his projection disappeared. Back at the Crystal realm, his main body had finally reached his destination. Now he had to figure out the right teleportation formation, and get about using it.

A large, chameleon-like reptile made its way through a busy street. On this planet ruled by insectoids it was not exactly welcome, but the locals did not do much else but give him dirty looks. After all, he already had a reputation here, so they knew not to mess with the Reptilian Dance King!

Chuckling to himself as he thought of his fond memories on this planet, and how his dance moves had brought its leaders to their knees, he kept moving through the crowds until he finally reached his destination: the Infinity Emporium.

The chatroom he was a part of was quite massive, and was quite helpful at times. In fact, it had separate sub-channels for some of the realms. The Origin realm, as it happened, was one of the realms which had its own sub-channel. Within it, some of the more experienced users shared some helpful tips and tricks. The emporium happened to be highly endorsed on the channel.

Although the emporium had not spread to other realms - yet - it was quite widespread within the Origin realm and so having a good relationship with them was quite helpful. The dance king made his way in, only to find a familiar face waiting for him at the counter.

"Powell, my good friend, how are you?" the dance king asked.

"Superb now that you're here," replied Powell, smiling back at him. Powell was, of course, also a chameleon - or so it appeared. It was common knowledge shared within the chat that the race of the shopkeeper one would run into would always be identical to the person walking in. Also, every one of them was named Powell.

How or why such a thing happened had remained unexplained, but almost every person in the Origin realm had used their system detector in the emporium, only to come up with a failed report. That either meant that Powell was not a system user, or his system was so advanced and powerful that their machines were not capable of detecting them - in which case it was better for them to not try and antagonize Powell to begin with.

"It's a good thing you're in a good mood, for I need help in an unusual matter. I need any information you have on a place called the 'Midnight Inn'. At the same time, if you happen to have one of their golden keys, I'll take that off your hands as well."

"Hold a moment," said Powell before he quickly began perusing on his tablet. But his search did not take as long as expected, and his uncomfortable facial expression also told the dance king it was bad news.

"What is it?" he asked, suppressing his growing concern.

"There's a strict ban on all emporium employees. We cater to no business requests related to the Midnight Inn."

The king was startled by this answer, for he had never heard of such a thing.

"Officially, I can't help you," said Powell as he whispered, reaching close to him. "But unofficially... I can't help it if you overhear me say that a lot of the 'golden keys' you mentioned have been spotted in and around the Pental Galaxy."

"That... that's over a 100,000 galaxies away!" said the dance king, startled. It seemed like he had accepted a difficult quest. Or maybe not.

"Okay forget the Inn. I need a ticket for the Wormhole ferry."

"Oh, that'll cost you. With the Henali Champions tourney coming up, all intergalactic travel has really jumped up in price."

The dance kind did not hesitate in throwing a brown bag full of crystal coins onto the table. Since not everyone had a credit card, they had to make do with coin bags.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 656: Tell me more

The capital of the Noel family's territory was extremely large, but that came as no surprise. A sprawling city covered both sides of a river 50 feet (15.2 meters) wide. White floor walls covered the length of the river crossing the city, setting the theme for the city's color scheme.

Oddly enough, there were almost no high rises in the entire city, with the only exception being a large, spiraling tower in the heart of the city that Lex suspected could double as a lighthouse.

The top of the tower also looked suspiciously similar to a bird stand. He could not imagine that the Noel family had built a spot for Sol birds to rest right within their capital. But then again, why couldn't they?

Lex did not speculate further on the topic, and instead focused on figuring out how to reach the teleportation formation. There was no boundary wall to the city, so entering was no problem. The real problem was navigating the maze-like streets to find his destination.

Although there were no highrises in the city, each building was three stories high and built closely together, making it so that while walking in the streets, the rest of the city could not really be seen.

It wasn't as if Lex did not ask directions, but there were just too many streets. It was difficult to cover any real distance in a short period of time. More than once Lex had to convince Fenrir not to jump on

top of the buildings and just bypass all the traffic on the ground, though he himself began to wonder why he was stopping the trusty wolf.

Eventually, though, the conclusion that Lex came to about why they were having such a tough time finding their destination, was that both he and Fenrir were unreasonably hungry. The two decided to take a break, and once Fenrir shrunk his size down, they found their way to a tavern called Hippo House tavern.

The owner was a hairy man with a large belly and a laugh that shook the foundations of the entire building. He was sitting behind the counter, greeting each and every guest as they walked in, recognizing almost every patron.

Lex greeted the man with matching enthusiasm, and struck up a conversation with him about the city, though Lex did not talk about anything in particular and seemed to be interested in anything and everything. The owner was even more enthusiastic about conversing with Lex once he saw the amount of food that he ordered.

For cultivators, it was not unusual to eat a lot of food so Lex's order was not surprising. But even so, the amount of food Lex ordered was genuinely surprising, and for the owner, pleasing.

While Lex was eating and chatting, he naturally also brushed on the topic of the teleportation formation. That was when, for the first time, he understood the complexities involved in long distance teleportation.

According to the map he had been provided, his next destination was a place called Delurian Drip Bog. It was pretty simple to say that he just needed to take the teleportation formation and select that as his destination, but apparently this was one of the furthest places the formation teleported to. In a straight line, it was approximately 31,000 miles (49,889 km) away, which, if Lex remembered correctly, was greater than the circumference of the earth.

But he was already used to teleporting anywhere he wanted using the Inn, not to mention the teleportation he experienced to travel from one planet to another back in the Origin realm. That alone was no doubt countless lightyears of distance covered during one teleportation.

As a result, he had become desensitized to the complexities of the act. But conversing with the tavern owner brought him back to reality. Under ordinary circumstances, the teleportation formation would only be active one day a week, and each individual spot cost tens of thousands of spirit stones.

Lex naturally had such an amount. He had long since begun to gather as many physical forms of currency and valuables, which naturally included spirit coins, spirit stones, spirit liquid, gold, jewels, a few other valuable metals that were not found on earth and some other random spirit based currencies. He had received these mostly from the emporium, though some small exchanges he had set up in the Guild room also contributed.

Since he was going to be traveling, he naturally stocked up his spatial bangle with everything he could possibly need. That was not the issue. The issue was... this was so damn expensive for an ordinary person! He remembered back when he was at the academy and went out on the expedition, a massive group was traveling with them. He could not even imagine the cost of transporting so many people.

It seemed that, despite his efforts to gather as much general knowledge as possible, he had gaps in his knowledge. When he asked why it was so expensive, the tavern owner merely shrugged and commented that he'd heard some of the resources used in building the formation were extremely rare and expensive, and would often get used up. As for what they were, only actual formation experts would know.

Lex made a mental note to hire some formation experts for the Inn. There was no profession that the Inn should lack knowledge of, and as the Innkeeper, he needed to have an in-depth understanding of all such matters.

Lex also realized one more very important thing. In fact, it could be said to be crucially important to the development of the Inn. He did not want to admit it, but the food this random tavern gave was actually somewhat better than the food served at the Inn.

As of late, the Inn had started having better and better ingredients due to the turtle's efforts and the expanded farmlands, but that was not enough. At most it provided him with vegetables and fruits, but he lacked any kind of meat to go along with it. Moreover, even if he had incredible ingredients, the cooks he had were good, but not skilled enough to be mind blowing. If only he could put up a recruitment notice for someone with a cooking system, how great would that be?

With such thoughts in his mind, Lex finally finished the meal. After thanking the tavern owner for keeping him company, a satisfied Lex and Fenrir left. Although he had found out that the teleportation

formation would only work once a week, he had no intention of waiting that long. The token given to him by Jolene should be enough to have them start the formation for him early right? Besides, he had a good relationship with the Noel family. He was sure, if nothing else, they could figure out some deal.

New York, Earth

Rafael walked through the long, extravagant hallways of his fathers latest mansion with an extremely serious expression. The war on earth had been going on miserably, but they were alive. However, if his suspicions were right, that might soon change.

When he finally reached his fathers room, he did not bother knocking and just barged in. 'King' Marlo could be seen casually reclining on a chair, his butler standing beside him giving some kind of report. He wore no shirt, yet his chest was covered in bandages to help him heal from his many wounds.

"Old man, we have trouble," Rafael said, not bothering with semantics right now. He was having great trouble as it was, surviving in this new reality of his. It was nothing like the future he knew, and if it weren't for his skills and insights from all the battles he recalled from the future, he would not have survived. Almost every opportunity he could possibly gain on earth was already probably gone, and lord only knew if the threats and dangers he recalled from the future would even come now or not. Or, if they came, what would happen.

"What is it?" Marlo asked, taking his son quite seriously. Although he was not exactly satisfied with Rafael's personal strength, the kid had spent countless years in a coma. He could not be blamed.

Besides, his leadership in battle and his unmatched foresight and skill made him worthy of recognition in his own right. No longer was he called Marlo's son when people talked of him. He was Rafael, the greatest living human general on earth right now.

"If my guess is correct, we're going to face an attack soon. One we can't possibly survive."

"Oh? What makes you say that? We have many allies, I doubt they'd let us suffer such an attack unaided."

"That's where you're wrong," Rafael said, shaking his head. "I've been monitoring troop movements for a while now. Based on the trends I've seen, and the hints I've collected, I suspect that the deities and A.I. have reached a tacit agreement about us. Since we don't support the deities preaching in New York, we are nothing but an eye sore to them. If they can get rid of us, there will be one less competitor for earth."

Instead of being alarmed, Marlo smiled.

"Tell me more."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 657: Hidden Intentions

"Right now, on earth, there are 4 forces competing against one another. The first is naturally the A.I. who have invaded with the intention of killing everyone. The second are the deities who have agreed to aid the humans in fighting them off. On the surface it seems like they want to help the humans, but more and more I feel like they have ulterior motives. After all, there is nothing of value on earth that they want to protect, and I find it hard to believe they are doing this out of the goodness of their hearts.

"The issue with the third party, the devils supporting the remnants of the ruling families, is the same. The only thing is that I cannot guess what they are after right now. That finally leaves the fourth party, which is us - the unaffiliated humans.

"While theoretically we should be allies with the deities and devils against the A.I. I suspect something sinister is afoot. Based on reports from our scouts, all the 'allied' forces near us have been slowly yet seemingly inadvertently moving away. I think that they have tacitly consented to our demise, so that there is one less player for them to compete with."

"Alright, so where do you think the decisive attack will come from?" Marlo asked, seemingly still unperturbed. In fact, even the butler did not seem to show any emotions besides annoyance and exhaustion.

"The point of the attack is to take us by surprise and give us no time to prepare so that they can decimate us. I suspect they will send in soldiers directly from orbit, landing behind our defensive lines, or come from the water where our visuals are blocked. Most likely, considering that in the past we have

shown effective battle effectiveness in two separate groups, you being one group and me with the army being another, they will attack from three directions simultaneously."

Marlo nodded, and said, "not bad. Your analysis is getting better and better each day."

"Is this really the time to be focused on such a thing?" Rafael asked, feeling emotionally exhausted.

"I think any time is a good opportunity for a father to compliment his son," Marlo said, chuckling to himself.

Rafael... couldn't reply. So instead, he just waited for the 'King' to bestow him with a proper answer.

"You forget, my son, the thing I excel in most is self defense," Marlo finally said, seeing as how Rafael was not in the mood to humor him. "Let me show you a little something I've been working on."

Marlo merely extended his hand forward and used a certain technique. Rafael's pupils shrunk as he stared at his father's hand in horror and surprise. His stupid father was a maniac!

Lex made his way to the Noel family mansion, which was a lot easier to find than the teleportation formations. After all, the mansion itself seemed to be a tourist attraction of sorts. Apparently, once a month, during a special event, tourists were even allowed to enter certain portions of it.

He expected that the process to gain admittance would be difficult or complex, and he was ready to flaunt the token given to him by the Phillips family if necessary, yet his experience was quite unexpected. The moment he approached the gate, the guards seemed to recognize him and all suddenly stood at attention.

The gates were opened even before he arrived, and an escort astride some kind of beast suddenly appeared, to guide Lex deeper inside. At first he wanted to ask how or why they recognized him, but upon noticing the reverence on the soldiers faces as they watched him pass, he felt too awkward to do so.

Lex was led all the way to the front door, where a tall, well-dressed man seemed to be waiting for him.

"Mr. Lex, it is a pleasure to finally meet you," the man said as he gave a deep bow, before approaching Lex to shake his hand.

Lex did not hesitate to grab the man's hand and give him a firm handshake, a pleasant smile on his face. Yet behind his perfectly pleasant appearance, Lex had raised his guard to the maximum. It was not just his instincts that warned him, but that he himself could judge that there was something off about this overly enthusiastic fellow.

"The pleasure is mine. I have never had such a warm welcome somewhere before."

"Then you should come here more often! Had I known you were coming, I would have prepared an even grander welcome!"

The man laughed as he welcomed Lex inside the mansion, as if he was extremely pleased with himself.

"Please, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Marcus, I am Lord Joseph Noel's nephew. I look after the mansion and the city while uncle is not here. You may be somewhat surprised at your reception, but uncle sent your information to all the cities in his territory. You'll find that you will receive the best possible treatment anywhere you are recognized."

"That... I was not expecting such a thing," said Lex, genuinely surprised.

"Indeed. Uncle has not given any other information, except to treat you with the utmost respect. Although it's short notice, as soon as the guards informed me of your arrival, I passed orders for a banquet in your honor. All the dignitaries from across the city will be invited."

"That... that sounds wonderful," said Lex, successfully hiding the deep reluctance he felt upon hearing the news. "But unfortunately I have important business that is very time sensitive. Since you have already recognized me, and since Joseph has been kind enough to pass such instructions, things should be much simpler. I need to use the teleportation formation to Delurian Drip Bog. I can naturally cover the cost of having the formation activated ahead of time."

"Nonsense! If I make you pay, then uncle will disown me! How urgent is your task? I can have the formation readied within the hour."

"As soon as possible would be much appreciated. It's not that I don't wish to receive your hospitality, but I really cannot wait."

"Well then, please wait a moment while I go and get things ready."

Marcus left Lex in a lavish sitting room while he left to make preparations. Lex did not drop his guard even when he was left alone, nor did he let anything show in his expressions. That was because, after spending some more time with Marcus, Lex had clearly noticed a deep hostility buried in the man's heart. Of course, he had done his best to hide it, but with Lex's vast experience dealing with people, his sixth sense, his instincts, not to mention his extremely astute pup companion, he could hide nothing from Lex.

Of course, Lex did not care why Marcus felt that hostility, or what his story was. As long as he did not interfere with Lex's task in any way, he would be happy enough to leave things be.

His wait was short and uneventful, as Marcus soon returned, taking long and purposeful strides.

"The formation is being prepared. Why don't we take a carriage to the terminal, it should be completely ready by the time we arrive."

"Excellent."

Marcus led Lex back to the front of the mansion where a carriage was already waiting for them, and accompanied him as they departed. The entire time, Marcus wore a massive grin, as if he was extremely pleased and enthusiastic to meet Lex. Any normal person would completely be fooled by the act. Even if they suspected something, they would only suspect that the cause of Marcus' enthusiasm was a desire to please his uncle.

"What's that tower for?" Lex asked when the conversation allowed, pointing to the massive structure in the middle of the city.

"That's the local Sol bird shrine. Although we, the Noel family, are not able to tame Sol birds in the way the Hum nation does, it is not a problem to establish a relationship. We have a flock of over 20 Sol birds who consider this territory as their home, and visit the shrine every month to be worshiped by the locals. I'm not sure why they like it so much, but this is quite a common custom in all remote territories."

Lex did not comment as various thoughts ran through Lex's mind. He was reminded of the deities, and wondered if the Sol birds counted as such. Why else would they give so much importance to being worshiped?

There was a very easy way to find out the answer. The turtle had adopted a Sol bird back at the Inn. All he needed to do was scan it to learn more. And if that didn't work, he could ask the turtle. He could also...

Suddenly Lex froze, as a thought occurred to him. He pretended to rub his eyes while he secretly put on the Fancy Contact lenses. It was time to see if these things were any good.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 658: Trapped

The first time Lex used the Fancy Monocle, the amount of details it provided were overwhelming. It analyzed the material of each and every item it saw, and started randomly measuring things in detail he found difficult to even imagine ever needing. To be able to keep it at a level where Lex could actually use it, he had to disable many features and keep it limited in what information it provided him. As a result, in the early days, it had even saved his life by detecting the arrival of zombies before he himself was able to see them.

Now, honestly, Lex barely felt the need to use them. Not only were his instincts incredibly strong, but his own observation alongside the use of his spirit sense made it so that he felt like the Fancy contact lenses probably could not keep up with him. That is one of the reasons he hadn't really bothered using them. Another was that, although he kept his left eye's ability turned off, it could also see a lot of details that he still found hard to completely comprehend.

So how could the lenses possibly keep up? But right now, he tried them anyway. Especially because he had also picked up a special spiritual technique that he could use in conjunction with the lenses. He assumed that they might become helpful with that extra push.

He quickly realized just how much he had been underestimating the lenses. Due to his increased cultivation, his brain could now process the massive amounts of data the lenses were providing him with, all without actually distracting him from functioning normally.

Moreover, the Fancy Monocle relied on Lex to fill its database, so the information was a lot more detailed, and revealed information that Lex didn't even know how to comprehend. For example, when he put on the contacts, he looked around the carriage and learnt that the Gangileon atmospheric density within the carriage was 7. What did that even mean?

But aside from the data he could make no sense of, there was plenty of information that he could comprehend. The carriage was made from a kind of material called Sublime composite, which was artificially created using various extremely valuable materials which had excellent energy insulating capabilities. He also learnt that exactly 3.4 tones of Sublime composite was used in the construction of the carriage, and that there were a series of other valuable materials fixed at various edges of the carriage, making it aesthetically pleasing. Yet, underneath all that was a carefully planned formation which used the Sublime composite as a foundation and other items as supporting materials. The lenses were able to recognize the existence of the formation due to key principals which were being applied, though it could not determine the specific formation being used.

Based on his own instincts, he knew that the carriage was no threat to him, but he had been completely ignorant of the fact that the carriage itself was a moving formation.

As such, this served as a learning experience for him. Moreover, due to his increased mental capabilities, encountering these items and gaining an in-depth explanation about how they were being used was enough for him to learn about them for good. In the future, if he ever encountered a similar situation, he would be able to identify them on his own. Moreover, they were serving as inspiration for things to do at the Inn.

He turned to look at Marcus, who was still smiling and talking, and was intrigued by the information the lenses were able to gather.

The first thing the lenses informed him of was that they could only gather surface level information from him because he seemed to be employing a protective technique that protected him from probing. Yet it could still identify his height, weight, skin temperature, and much more. The thing he found most intriguing was that by studying the subtle tightness and relaxed state of the muscles all over his body,

the lens could reasonably guess what kind of emotions Marcus was actually feeling. Of course, this was again not a detailed review for a more thorough scan was blocked.

That was the point at which Lex used the accompanying technique for the Fancy contact lenses, and things reached a whole new level!

The contact lenses, instead of providing him with the final conclusion of its analysis, began giving him raw data on what it was seeing. That's when the technique took over.

The world itself became more vibrant, as if Lex was suddenly able to see new colors. Moreover, he could see those colors to absorb new information from them.

For example, the hidden hostility that Lex had detected from Marcus was now as apparent as day, and seemed to paint the entire man in shades of green and red. Feelings of inferiority, jealousy, envy, hatred and a tinge of admiration made up the foundation of his hostility. But that was not all. Lex could almost see into his mind, as if reading his thoughts. Marcus was jealous because... he thought Lex was engaged to Greta Noel, and would thus be joining the main family, and that was the reason he was so appreciated by Joseph.

He felt overlooked and underappreciated, and there was a seed of sinister intentions that seemed to be sprouting within him. Lex could almost actually see what actions he was planning to take, as if he was watching a movie.

Lex looked out to the tower, and saw that it seemed to be acting as some kind of funnel, channeling some unknown energy through its base to its tip, where the energy was gathering. He could tell that when enough energy gathered, the birds would probably come and rest there, and the monthly worshiping ceremony would commence. How intriguing.

Lex spent the rest of the carriage ride in relative silence, as he absorbed the information the lenses were giving him.

When they finally arrived at the building where the teleportation formation was, Lex interestingly looked around like a child at a zoo. The lenses still did not recognize the formation, but since Lex already knew the purpose of it, he could extrapolate even more information. Moreover, he was now more easily able to guess Marcus' plan.

Lex didn't know how much he trusted the information from the lenses, so he started planning out a way to ensure everything went smoothly, without preemptively attacking or punishing Marcus. It was an intriguing challenge, since he already knew what he wanted to do.

"Are you sure you won't accept any payment?" Lex asked one last time, as Marcus led him to the teleportation room. This time around, only he and Fenrir would use the formation, so he expected it to cost a lot, but Marcus was insistent that they could not accept payment.

One had to admit, his acting of being the perfect host was quite remarkable.

"Impossible. Something as minor as this is not even enough to count as being a good host. Next time you visit, you must allow me to throw a banquet for you."

"Then take care of yourself. Next time, we will definitely dine together."

With a smile and a nod, Lex walked to the center of the teleportation platform, a tiny Fenrir following along. A few minutes later, the formation completely turned on, and the two disappeared.

As if a switch had been flipped, Marcus' generous smile turned into an ugly scowl. He had no idea who Lex was, or why his uncle gave him so much importance. Irritation and jealousy filled his entire being, engulfing him. There was a minor struggle in his mind as he wondered if he should really do something. In the end, he concluded that there was no way for anyone to detect if he did anything, and so made a move.

Prior to the teleportation he had not interfered with the formation, as there were many ways to detect such things, and he did not know if Lex would be able to tell it had been tampered with. Yet now that he was already gone, or to be more specific, mid-teleportation, there was nothing he could do.

With eyes filled with sinister intentions, Marcus moved, not towards the exit, but the control room. The teleportation formation, in truth, was quite massive and could not really fit inside a room. The entire formation was hidden from view, with only two points within reach. One was the teleportation platform, and the other was the control panel in the adjacent control room.

Yet the moment Marcus tried to enter the room, he hit an invisible barrier. As if triggered by something, the invisible barrier became opaque, making Marcus realize that he was trapped inside.

"Young man, you're a thousand years too young to be playing such games in front of me," a familiar voice said, startling Marcus. He turned around, but could not find Lex anywhere, so then where was his voice coming from?

"As a small punishment, I'll leave you in this small room for a few months. Use this time to contemplate your life decisions. The next time we meet, I'll ask you about the conclusion you reached."

A trace of fear crept into Marcus' heart as he tried to figure out what was going on. Yet no matter how he searched, he could not come up with an answer, and he could not break the barrier either. He was completely trapped.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 659: Nemesis

Marcus was not a weakling. Since he had been trusted by Joseph to take care of things in his absence, then not only did Marcus have to have a minimum cultivation, he needed to have proved himself over the years. He was a mid level Nascent realm cultivator, with excellent administrative experience as well as battle experience in skirmishes against neighboring nobles.

All in all, he could be considered to have vast experience in various fields. Yet at the moment he found himself completely at a loss. He did not even consider how Lex was able to discover his intentions, for that no longer mattered.

What truly befuddled him was how Lex was able to trap him after he had already left. After all, the opaque barrier surrounding him had not appeared until he tried to enter the control room. Moreover, the fact that Lex's voice spoke to him after the barrier appeared also meant that this was no accident.

But his panic dissolved quickly, and instead he focused on breaking the barrier. He took his time to use one of his most powerful spiritual techniques which had a long starting time, and attacked the barrier full force.

Truthfully, this was not a good idea as using such a destructive technique in close quarters would also harm him, but he would deal with that after he broke free. Unfortunately, not only did he not break free, the barrier did not even waver.

Disbelieving of what he was seeing, Marcus tried again. Then again. The barriers were not breaking. Moreover... to his alarm, he discovered that as he absorbed the spirit energy in the atmosphere to fuel his techniques, the energy density of the room was falling. That meant that the barrier prevented more energy from coming into the room!

This was even more alarming. If such a trend continued, not only would he soon run out of energy to fuel his attacks, he would run out of energy to sustain himself. If what Lex said was true, and he was trapped for weeks or months, he had to be extremely sparing in his energy consumption. Such a period of time was not a problem for him to survive even without food or water, so long as he had enough energy to fuel his nascent soul.

Desperation began filling his eyes and he took out some weapons from his spatial ring and continued to try to break free, but it was not destined to be. There were many things Lex could not claim to be skilled in. But as far as putting up barriers that could absorb a lot of damage was concerned, Lex felt himself an expert.

A few minutes later, Lex's teleportation ended, and he found himself in a smaller room with a few guards standing by, taking note of all the arrivals. This was the arrival terminal for Delurian Drip Bog. The area was not really a part of anyone's territory, but bordered the territory of various nobles and so was considered somewhat of a transit area.

There were a minimum amount of facilities available for travelers, but that was it. This was because the Bog was actually quite massive, and home to numerous savage beasts of considerable strength. In fact, even Trelops had given up on using the bog for themselves, as the local fauna was not conducive to occupying territory. Therefore, building too many facilities was also not a solution.

Usually, traveling through the bog meant following certain, pre-established routes which avoided the known beast territories. Even that carried with it a risk, which usually prompted large groups to gather and form caravans.

Lex, of course, was not going to bother with any of that. He would make a beeline towards his destination, only taking diversions if his instincts warned him. Well instincts and now his lenses. He was truly beginning to like them.

After all, based on the data provided by the lenses and his own instincts and intuition, Lex was able to predict that Marcus would take one of two actions. He would either leave without doing anything, or interfere with Lex's teleportation, sending him instead to some unknown territory.

Having narrowed down Marcus' possible actions, Lex began devising his actions. Although he had incredible defensive techniques, he could not deploy them without being there himself, so the only alternative was to use arrays.

That in itself was not an issue. He quite enjoyed arrays, and with practice he was slowly mastering stronger and more complex arrays. He also kept consulting the book in his ring, though by now he had covered almost the entire book and would soon need a higher level book to consult.

The real issue was twofold. First, he had to ensure that the array would only trigger its trapping function if Marcus tried to take some action against him. Second, he needed to trap Marcus in barriers strong enough to actually hold him.

If he could use his techniques that might not be an issue, but his arrays never benefited from the strengthening effect of Regal Embrace. Ideally he wanted to create some kind of barrier as strong as his Impervious Hands - his strongest defensive technique.

Creating a condition for the activation of the array was challenging, but not impossible. He entered the Overdrive state and ultimately came up with a solution. Creating a barrier strong enough to trap a Nascent realm cultivator, though... also ended up being pretty simple!

Back when Lex was going through the floors in the pagoda, one of the rewards for clearing the floors had been an array character that meant 'self'. Learning that character enabled Lex to try something new. Instead of creating complex functions that would eventually result in a strong barrier being created, he used the techniques he could use as a natural standard. Conveniently, the array seemed to work.

With both the issues resolved, Lex happily entered the teleportation formation without concern for what happened. The fact that he had arrived safely either meant that Marcus had not attempted to harm him, or that he had, and his plan was foiled by Lex's own array.

Either way, Lex was satisfied with the outcome.

"You ready?" Lex asked Fenrir as they exited the terminal. "This next part will be longer, and probably more dangerous too."

Fenrir only gave a single, excited bark, indicating his answer.

An odd thought occurred to Lex as he climbed onto Fenrir's back, allowing the pup to begin his sprint through the bog. Fenrir was in the golden core realm, yet the pup could still not talk. Yet Lex had met so many other beasts who had been able to actually talk with him even at the Foundation realm.

He wondered why there was a difference. Clearly Fenrir was intelligent, and his abilities were powerful and numerous. So then why was the pup still limited to barking and yelping, instead of talking like other beasts? He refused to believe that other beasts had a higher pedigree than Fenrir. This belief was not a result of a bias, but a clear answer provided to him by the system.

After pondering for a bit, the only answer he could come up with was that Fenrir was still a pup, and would have to grow for a few more years before it could gain the gift of speech.

Unlike the previous time, where Lex had a clear destination, this time Lex only had a direction. He had to travel using the Crystal realm equivalent of a compass, and head north-east until he reached the territory owned by Sentinels, one of the main races of the Crystal realm. Moreover, the trip was also much longer than his previous one.

Traveling through the bog was not easy or pleasant. Besides the various pungent smells of unknown gasses, which only made one lightheaded due to the overpowering scent, there were also many poisonous gasses.

Fortunately, Lex quickly discovered that both he and Fenrir seemed to be immune to most of the poisons they encountered. Moreover, by reading about them from the lenses every time he encountered them, Lex began to learn exactly what types of poisons his body could withstand. Of course, there were some poisonous gasses they had to avoid, for they could harm even them.

Besides that was the extremely damp and humid environment, not to mention the endless puddles, the soggy, squishy ground and what often looked like firm ground, but ended up being a soft layer of dirt covering some strange viscous liquids.

The extremely uncomfortable environment almost made one ignore the numerous decaying corpses they encountered on almost every turn. That was because hidden in every puddle, under every clump of soil, behind every rock was some kind of creature, waiting to devour its prey.

Fenrir quite enjoyed the game of tag the endless creatures played as they chased them through the bog. Lex, too, would not have cared so much, if he hadn't encountered his oldest and most hated nemesis in the bog: mosquitoes. Moreover, they were overgrown, mutated mosquitoes!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 660: Two weeks

Within the bog, for the first time, Fenrir's excellent stealth abilities failed the duo. That was because as much as his abilities could hide them from being sensed, if the pup ran across a beast's nose, then it would not need to rely on spiritual sense to find them. The problem was that this example did not carry any exaggeration at all, and was exactly what the duo faced.

At times, the bog was so completely empty that they would not come across a single living thing. Other times, the place was so packed that let alone run from in front of a beast, Fenrir directly used a beast's head as a platform to jump over.

Yet what was fortunate was that none of the creatures chasing them held any considerable threat. In fact, the reason they were chasing was because Lex and Fenrir couldn't be bothered to deal with them, as it would be too tedious. Besides, after chasing them for a while, the beasts would either get tired, or return to their respective territories.

Of course, once or twice they encountered some beasts that they could not afford to ignore. Most of the time, in such scenarios, they would choose to circle around them. If that was not possible only then would they fight. Moreover, they attacked with full force right from the get go, so they usually overwhelmed their targets.

Many times, while on their journey, they crossed by some places where Lex would feel incredible opportunities waiting for them. He felt his instincts tell him that he would benefit greatly by diverting to a certain direction, or the lenses identified some incredibly rare treasures. For example, once while running, Lex spotted what looked like a decaying tree, only for the lenses to identify them as a certain incredibly valuable herb. Moreover, the age of the herb was already several hundred years old. Among

many of its other uses, the one that his lens listed that appealed most to Lex was that it could be used by Body cultivators to temper their bodies even if they were in the Nascent realm.

Such a herb was genuinely extremely valuable, and Lex even considered having it sent to the greenhouse at the Inn. But, for better or for worse, Lex had decided not to take any detours during this journey. No matter how attractive an opportunity seemed, he ignored it.

It may have seemed like a waste at first, but the longer they kept running, the more appropriate it seemed. After a day of running through the bog, Lex still felt some reluctance. Three days later, he had more or less become used to the feeling of ignoring opportunities. A week later, he was completely numb to it.

It was taking so long to travel to their destination, if he were to take small stops at every opportunity, their journey would only become that much longer. Still, he mentally marked the bog as an area where he could potentially come back if he ever needed to gather some treasures.

The tedium and monotony of their travel changed on the eighth day, when the flock of Sol birds in the region suddenly flew away. Their departure was extremely sudden and left them no room for preparation.

The darkness that followed was all encompassing, and carried a weight with it that the entire bog felt, not just the duo. All the creatures that had been chasing them so far suddenly stopped, and in fact did something that surprised Lex. They left their territories, and participated in a mass migration where no one creature harmed another. Despite their usual animosity, they traveled together in harmony.

Where they were heading was a mystery to Lex, for it was not in the same direction as him. An hour later, the bog had become the most silent he had seen since he arrived. The sound of Fenrir's running was muted due to the pups own abilities, so the only sound for them to hear was of the bog itself.

Each bubble of noxious gas that escaped a nearby puddle, the rustling of the grass in the wind, the eerie wailing and croaking of old dead trees all seemed to form an orchestra that could be heard for miles.

For a short while, they enjoyed, or suffered through, the symphony of nature that the bog orchestrated before soft, distant sound disturbed it. It was the sound of a footstep in the mushy, squishy ground of the bog. Then, a few moments later, there was another.

Slowly and steadily, bit by bit, the monsters of the darkness started to appear. But these monsters, who were born from the fresh darkness, would be the weakest, and were not worth Lex's attention. In fact, it would take weeks or even months before any monsters capable of attracting their attention could even be born.

None the less Lex remained careful, for he did not know how the creatures of the bog would react. Since they had lived in such circumstances for countless years, they clearly had a way to deal with monsters, and Lex didn't want to get swept in with them when that happened.

Through the pitch darkness, the duo continued their journey for several more days. The vast size of the Crystal realm was finally coming into perspective, for they had gone running nonstop for days without crossing through it, and this was only supposed to be a small territory.

Finally, after running continuously for two weeks, Lex decided to take a break. Even if he could continue to stay awake for longer, he thought it was best to refresh themselves so they stayed in peak condition. He was also especially concerned for Fenrir. The pup displayed no agitation or exhaustion, but this was the longest the pup had ever gone without resting or playing at the Inn, so he wanted him to get some rest as well.

The duo teleported back, and both of them went to their own abodes to clean and freshen up. Although they had already become numb to it, that did not mean that others could ignore the stench of the bog that they were reeking.

After a nice, refreshing bath, Lex came to the conclusion that the Inn needed to focus more on spa facilities.

New Notification: The Midnight Inn is not liable for the hosts' bad hygiene.

Lex froze. That was the first time the system had directly responded to one of his random thoughts with a notification. Was this a result of the system's functionality improving? He tried to test it out by thinking of a few other random but derisive thoughts, but the system provided no other notifications.

Lex took note of the occurrence but did nothing else about it. He went straight to bed to get his first sleep in over two weeks.

He was out the moment his head hit the pillow, a miracle on its own, and enjoyed a deep, restful sleep that lasted only six hours. Even that was a result of Lex refusing to wake up stubbornly. He was quite upset about his body's decreased dependence on sleep. It was one of his favorite hobbies.

Fortunately, Mary appeared to provide him with a distraction from his woeful sleep situation.

"Alexander has come back to the Inn, and has requested to meet Lex."

"Is Fenrir awake?" Lex asked, hoping the pup shared in his misfortune.

"No, he's asleep." Unfortunately, it was not to be.

With a defeated sigh, he picked himself up and teleported over to Alexander, who was once again waiting for Lex in a remote location of the Inn. After ordering an unnecessarily large amount of food, Lex approached the teenager.

"I heard you're looking for me," Lex said with a pleasant smile as he sat across from him.

"Yes. Although, I didn't think you'd arrive so quickly."

"It just so happened that I was free and available. If you had arrived a few hours later, it was unlikely you'd be able to get in touch with me."

"It appears I am quite lucky. You once offered to spar with me, saying that it would be a good experience for the both of us. Is that offer still available?"

"Yes, of course. But I just ordered some food. Why don't we eat something first before we get down to business."

Alexander looked reluctant, but eventually sat down across Lex. Lex, in the meanwhile, was reminded of something by Alexander's mention of sparring. John, who had been challenged to a fight in the Murder

grounds, had still not returned. The challenger had not returned either, so there was no chance that he was dead - at least, he was not dead yet anyway. But the exceedingly long fight began to worry Lex. Was it normal for fights to last so long?

The truth was, fights between immortals really could stretch out for days, or sometimes even weeks. But in this case, the fighting was taking long, because John was slowly and steadily wearing his enemy out. Since the fight had turned out to be harder than expected, he had to take drastic measures.