

## Innkeeper 661

### The Innkeeper

#### Chapter 661: Cringe

John was aiming for a long, drawn out fight to maximize his advantages so let alone a few weeks, even a few months was acceptable. The hard part was not waiting, it was staying hidden as his opponent was truly, genuinely skilled. This was perhaps the most difficult fight he had ever experienced, which is why the reward would no doubt be so much sweeter.

But John wasn't the only one locked in a tough battle. Down on earth, Marlo's domain was under attack. Although, as of yet, the attack had not reached the level that Rafael had predicted, things were moving in the direction he predicted. He suspected that the enemy wanted to exhaust all their energy and resources before they came in for the finish, to prevent the use of any unexpected, hidden trump cards.

But none of that had anything to do with Lex, at least for now. He had his hands full with his own endeavors, and could not afford to be distracted. Even meeting Alexander was a luxury he would not have availed if Fenrir were not still asleep.

"So how come you suddenly thought of sparring?" Lex asked. "From what I recall, you were extremely busy with your mission. Taking time off to fight a few rounds does not exactly sound like the best course of action when chasing terrorists. Not to mention, you don't look too great either."

Alexander gave Lex an exhausted look, before letting out a long sigh.

"Things are not going well," Alexander confided. "There are too many unusual aspects about my current mission. You know, I used to think that I was thoroughly disadvantaged as someone who was raised on earth. If I had received the nurturing of the empire from birth, I would have been much stronger."

The teenager paused for a moment, as a waiter arrived and began laying food at the table, but then figured he wasn't saying anything confidential so he just continued.

"But, lately, I've finally come to realize a significant advantage I have based on my upbringing."

"Oh, what is that?" Lex asked as he began having fries.

"I've avoided the lifelong conditioning and propaganda that comes with living in such an environment. When I see things, I can retain an objective view, which allows me to see patterns and trends others are blind to.

"The empire is supposed to be this unstoppable behemoth, which has managed to gain control of over 20 galaxies and retained full control of each one. Can you even imagine 20 galaxies? Each one filled with vast, endless space. Each one populated with hundreds of trillions of different races. Each and every one of them harboring their own intricate and delicate internal systems of trade, competition, enmities, intrigue, politics, wars and more. Yet despite all of that, in its history, the control of the empire has never supposedly waver.

"That's the history that I was taught, or an overview of it. This control has been maintained through the use of excellent and ingenious administration, but moreover, a very advanced and powerful military, which is divided into various categories. One of the more important branches is the Cross Regional Interstellar Neutralizing Godfiend Experts (CRINGE). They are one of the most elite units, who scout talented recruits from each and every galaxy and train them to be loyal only to the empire, as they can be deployed absolutely anywhere to ensure safety and stability of the empire.

"The entire specific purpose of CRINGE is to ensure that no major force within the empire ever harbors rebellious thoughts. After all, there are quite a few forces in the galaxies who could make life incredibly difficult for the empire."

Lex was listening very seriously to Alexander, doing his best to not distract the kid as he continued to eat during his speech. But after the pause he took extended a little too long, Lex had to quickly swallow to ask a question.

"I take it that something happened to them?"

As if woken from a reverie, Alexander was momentarily startled, before he refocused again.

"No, no nothing happened to them. It's just that such a force already exists. Yet more and more often, across the empire, there are reports of small forces trying to gain independence from the empire. Such a

trend is not limited to just one galaxy, but is occurring in many of them. Even the large forces don't dare to cross the empire, so why are so many of the small ones taking that step?

"But, for now, the trend is completely insignificant. Based on the size and strength of the empire, such a thing will never destabilize it. Yet the fact that the trend even exists is concerning me. Moreover, instead of reducing, the terrorist attacks across the empire are increasing. As if that's not enough... as if that's not enough, I've heard rumors that the Fiery Mammoths are showing signs of aggression. That is not an adversary the empire can just shrug off.

"The timing of it all... it just doesn't seem right. I don't know if I'm imagining things, but I keep seeing all these signs as precursors... precursors to something absolutely devastating. And if something happens which can be described as devastating to the empire... I don't even know what we can do to survive."

Looking at the teenager, Lex could not help but pause. It was easy to always see him as Alexander, the incredibly talented and driven young man who had taken it upon himself to venture out into space alone to build a place for himself in the vast universe. Yet as a result of that, it was also easy to forget that, at the end of the day, he was a teenager.

To be clear, he did not look depressed, or even demotivated. If anything, he actually felt stronger than when Lex saw him last. It was highly likely that Alexander would be able to regulate his own mood himself soon enough. In fact, if Lex hadn't made him sit to chat, and instead directly consented to the spar, it was unlikely he would have mentioned anything at all.

Still, Lex felt like giving him a little motivation couldn't hurt.

"Do you know about the Henali?" Lex asked, taking a bite from his burrito between words.

"I've heard about and studied the Henali convention, if that's what you're talking about."

"No, not that. Well, it doesn't really matter. All you need to know is that, even the all mighty empire has to abide by the rules set forth by the Henali, or the Henali convention. So, atop the seemingly insurmountable force of the empire there is a bigger force. Yet even they, the Henali, cannot blatantly do as they please, and have to show due respect to a small, certain group of people. So that means that there are bigger fish than even them out there. Who knows how far along that chain goes.

"The point is, the universe is a big place, and as hard as it is, you have to accept that you're only a small part of it. Instead of focusing on far off and distant things, it's a lot more useful to focus on growing your own strength. That way, when you face any problems, you can do your best to resolve them. And if you can't, you can always run back to the Inn."

Although his last words were not the most pleasant to hear, Alexander seemed somewhat relieved to hear them. But the effect was only limited, as Alexander was only somewhat exhausted, he had not succumbed to the pressures he faced.

The two continued to chat for a while longer as Lex ate. As absurd as it seemed, he really did need to consume such large amounts of food to keep his body running effectively. Although his dependance on food had dropped drastically, it was not eliminated. Besides, he liked it.

But once the meal was coming close to ending, Lex could not help but bring the topic to their upcoming spar.

"You never really answered my question about why you wanted to spar," he said, before grabbing some sushi with his spirit sense.

"Like I said, the situation is bad. I need to improve my strength. Raising my cultivation realm would be the best solution, but it will take a considerable amount of time, especially since I have no time to cultivate at all these days. The next best thing is increasing my repertoire and getting my hands on new techniques. But while I have learnt the techniques, I'm not sure how effectively I can deploy them amidst battle yet. That's where you come in.

"If we spar, I don't really need to worry about hurting you, so I can go all out without any reservation. It's the closest thing to a live combat test I can get."

"What, the empire doesn't have sparring bots?"

Alexander winced as he heard that.

"They do... and I can't afford to keep breaking those."

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Chapter 662: Spar

"Oh?" Lex asked intrigued. "Seems like you've been putting in a lot of practice."

"I had to practice the technique somewhere... how was I supposed to know that if I break a training bot, I have to pay for it." Alexander said bitterly. For the first time, he felt the bitter pinch of poverty, as he didn't want to use his family's resources during this time where they were preparing to shift from Mars to Vegus Minima.

"Now you're making me curious. Let's head to a training hall. But, just a heads up, I don't have a lot of time so this can only be a short sparring session."

Alexander accepted, and the two made their way to the nearest training hall. Although Lex was looking forward to having a proper spar with Alexander, he knew that his current purpose was to allow the latter to become more accustomed to his latest techniques.

"We can get right into it and start the fight," Lex offered, "or you can first test out your techniques on me to practice. You don't need to be worried about holding back, I've improved considerably since we've last met. In fact, if you manage to actually hurt me I'd be extremely impressed."

"No, treat this as a normal fight. The whole point is to see if I can deploy the techniques under the pressure of combat. Moreover, some of the techniques rely on the element of surprise. Knowing about them beforehand can severely reduce the impact."

With the decision made, Lex no longer hesitated. Without forewarning, Lex launched himself at Alexander. Due to Lex's current abnormal strength, his speed was devastating and not easy to cope with, especially in the range that they were in.

Holding nothing back Lex threw a punch towards Alexander's face, completely expecting to make contact. But, surprisingly, Alexander had already started to evade even before Lex began to throw the punch.

Instantly a couple of thoughts ran through Lex's mind. First, he was fighting against someone who had some semblance of instincts similar to his own. Second, since attacks with a limited area of impact, such

as punches, could be easily avoided by making small movements under the guidance of instincts, he should aim for harder to dodge attacks.

Instead of punching, Lex decided to tackle Alexander with his body instead. Surely Alexander would have tried to dodge this as well, but Lex was moving too fast and they were too close.

Lex came in like a wrecking ball and smashed the teenager across the room, leaving destruction in his wake. The training room they were in was supposed to be able to accommodate Golden core experts, but Alexander's body broke several of the floor tiles and cracked several of the pillars in the room as he hit them. To be honest, Lex suddenly felt a little guilty about hitting him so hard.

In fact, his guilt slowly started to eat at him, and Lex began to wonder if his own sheer awesomeness had left behind a permanent scar in Alexander's psyche. Lex fell to his knees, on the verge of wailing about the absolute tragedy that was destroying the future of such a promising young lad, when he realized that his emotions were abnormal.

It was when he had that realization that he also realized that his instincts were warning him of something, but he had been too focused on his guilt to focus on it.

A golden laser as thin as about a golf ball suddenly hit Lex on the forehead. Lex had been too slow to dodge, as even he could not keep up with the speed of light, but the laser barely harmed him. Besides making him feel slightly warm, it brought a slight red color to his skin where he was hit, and a single tendril of smoke escaped.

Lex suddenly woke up from his abnormal state and realized that at some point, Alexander must have attacked his spirit! The fact that it had worked, however briefly, was absolutely startling!

For a moment, both Lex and Alexander looked at each other as if they were looking at monsters. Lex could not believe his mind was affected, for that would require influencing his 'spirit'. But since his spirit was fused with his body and soul, they had the same level of defense.

Theoretically speaking, since Lex had survived a physical attack from an immortal, then his spirit should also be able to do the same - albeit he had only 'survived' that attack, and came out of it heavily injured. Still, the comparison was enough to explain how difficult it was to sway Lex's mind.

Alexander, on the other hand, looked at Lex like some kind of freak out of a fiction novel, for being able to survive such an attack completely unharmed had to be fictional! The spirit attack Alexander had launched on Lex was an incredibly powerful one which required him to make many preparations before battle even began. That meant if he used the attack once, he could not use it again unless he went back and prepared again.

But it was worth it, for against a single powerful opponent, let alone freeze them, it could even completely destroy their psyche. Yet Lex had only suffered some mild guilt! Moreover, he recovered in less than a second!

Then there was the laser! He had actually killed many Golden core cultivators using that technique with a single hit, yet it could not even singe Lex's hair.

For a moment, both of them admired each other's skills, labeling the other as a freak. Then combat continued.

Lex popped in his Fancy lenses and, supported by his instincts, became impossible to hit. Moreover, since this was a spar, began testing out some theories that he always had.

His favorite technique these days, Impervious Hands, had a lot more potential than he initially assumed. Not only did it have a monumentally stronger defense, he could fuse his soul and spirit sense into it to be able to interact with souls and energy respectively. Moreover, once the technique was active, if he augmented it with more spirit energy, he could directly touch whatever affinity Lex had.

While previously his affinity was a vague and abstract concept, he had since developed an affinity to space. He wanted to see how his technique would be affected by that. Moreover, he wanted to see how well he could consciously control the energy in his opponents' attacks.

The triad that followed wrought untold destruction across the training room. It looked like a tornado had been trapped in the room rather than two people sparring.

Lex's absurd physical strength was alone in taking credit for the damage. Alexander had learnt a number of new techniques that relied on the golden colored laser he shot Lex with earlier.

Lex's strength and Alexander's lasers jointly became so destructive, they actually had to pause the sparring because it compromised the integrity of the training room. But since Lex still had more time, they just shifted to a new room and continued to fight.

Lex had to give Alexander genuine recognition. Although it could not be said that Lex was going all out, he had not held his physical strength back at all. Despite taking a few hits head on, Alexander seemed to be doing fine.

In fact, Lex could subtly detect the means Alexander was using to negate the strength of his attacks, but that did not reduce how impressive the task was. After all, who said one needed to take on all attacks? Not everyone was built as tough as Lex, so it was completely unfair to expect them to do so.

In the end, after a few hours of fighting, Mary finally informed Lex that Fenrir had woken up. As much as he enjoyed the fight, that was his cue to depart, so he informed Alexander. But, instead of ending it, Alexander asked Lex to withstand one last attack from him.

Unlike his previous techniques, which he was proficient enough in to use in battle, this one would take some time to prepare, so he needed to ask Lex to stand still.

Once Lex agreed, Alexander quickly sat on the floor cross legged as if he was meditating. But he was clearly not. The six blades that were by now Alexander's signature weapons, were summoned and arranged themselves in a circle, pointing towards his palms.

Beads of golden light began dripping across the lengths of the blades, falling from the tip into his hands as if they were liquid light. At first, Lex only watched silently and observed, but as time went on, the energy accumulating in Alexander's hands began pressuring him.

Although Lex was far from threatened, his eyes widened as he realized just how incredible Alexander was progressing. In fact, considering that the other was doing so well without a system made Lex feel a little ashamed. He decided to lend Alexander some help.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 663: Battlefields

It took Alexander quite a few minutes to completely gather enough liquid light in his hands to complete his attack. Once he opened his eyes and looked at Lex, the light in his hands began to effervesce and began to toss about as if bubbling with untamable energy.

Time seemed to slow down as Lex focused on the seated teenager. Maintaining eye contact, Alexander opened his mouth and ushered a single word, but Lex never heard it. There was an explosion of bright light, completely blinding not only him but the contact lenses as well. Moreover, a prickling sensation covered Lex's entire body, as if an army of ants was walking all over his skin. He tried opening his eyes to determine what had happened, but discovered that his movements were extremely slow and disoriented.

When he finally managed to open his eyes, Lex discovered, to his astonishment, that he felt dizzy. Moreover, he seemed to be looking at the ceiling. An involuntary grunt escaped his mouth as he eventually tried to move. As incredible as it may sound, Lex's body was incredibly sore and stiff, which made it uncomfortable for him to move.

When he finally recovered from whatever attack he had just suffered, Lex discovered that he was, once again, completely naked. Although his body was not too hurt, the fact that his body had turned completely red, as if sunburnt, was already a testament to the strength of Alexander's attack. Whatever this attack was, it had still not managed to break his skin, but internally, he felt like his bones had been thoroughly rattled.

"That was a good one," Lex said out loud as he picked himself up.

The pale-looking Alexander, who had overexerted himself for that attack, had his mouth hung open as he tried to imagine what exactly it would take to hurt Lex.

"Thanks," he managed to mumble as Lex helped him stand.

"I have something for you," Lex said, as he summoned the crystal crown he got so long ago from the Crystal realm. This was an extremely useful tool that Lex had once termed as his thinking cap. It allowed Lex to artificially enter a 'Flow' like state, and it was much stronger than Lex's own ability - or at least it was back then. Now, after multiple breakthroughs, Lex no longer needed it.

"This thing is called Issle'Garb, although I just usually refer to it as my thinking cap. It can only be used by people who follow the True path. Try it out."

Lex tossed the crown to Alexander as if it was a toy instead of a precious tool, which greatly startled Alexander, especially since he was still disoriented. But then he remembered he had spirit sense, so he directly grabbed the crown out of the air and put it on his head.

After channeling his spirit energy through the crown, Alexander experienced the wonderful feeling of the heightened 'Flow' state, and immediately understood its value.

"Are you sure you don't need this?" he asked, taking the crown off. Currently, he did not have the energy to spare to continue using it.

"Yes, it's not that useful for me anymore, so you might as well get some use out of it. The next few months I'll be slightly busy, so if you need me, try to leave a message in advance."

Then, without waiting for Alexander to reply, Lex teleported away. It was a bad habit he developed while acting as the Innkeeper.

Even though Lex had left, Alexander still had some more free time, so he decided to stay at the Inn and recover from his exhaustion for a bit. He exited the training room and was heading towards the lazy river when he saw a familiar face - one he hadn't seen in a while.

RussianPrincess77 was standing there, seemingly waiting for him. Why was she always so creepy like that? But then again, she was always extremely helpful.

Back when he was still on earth, she seemed to maintain some sort of advantage over him in cultivation. He thought that after everything he went through, he would finally overtake her, but no, his instincts were clearly warning him that she still had formidable strength.

"Long time no see," he said, as he walked to her.

"Yeah, it has been a while. I wish we could catch up, but you have no time. You really need to return to work."

"Huh?" Alexander didn't immediately understand what she was saying, so she clarified.

"Trust me, you want to go back to work as quickly as possible. When you get free again next time, look for me. I have a favor to ask of you."

Alexander was supposed to have a lot of free time, otherwise he would not have come to the Inn. But he already had some experience with RussianPrincess77's prophetic advice, so he decided to listen to her, and returned.

The moment he reappeared in his room back on Polebitvy, the sound of someone banging on his door welcomed him. Alarmed, he quickly opened the door to find his immediate superior, Immortal Valkyrie, standing there.

For some reason, probably due to his exhaustion from overexerting his energy, he had the deranged thought that Valkyrie looked somewhat similar to Lex. He immediately erased that thought, as he didn't want to curse his friend out like that.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked bluntly, clearly staring at his disheveled state.

"I was training. I had some free time while my latest report was being processed."

"Well, free time is over. I have no proof, but I feel like I know what Jeffery and his organization are after on this planet. In a few months, an incredibly important VIP will pass through here. I believe he is their target. Your new task... is to find proof of that."

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While Lex returned to the Crystal realm, to once again journey through the bog, and Alexander was being ordered around by 'Immortal Valkyrie', things on earth were extremely chaotic.

The invasion of New York had been going on for many days, but it suddenly took a turn for the worse. It was as if the A.I. had stopped focusing everywhere on earth, and instead were only attacking there.

Rafael was in the command center, organizing four different battles being held in different parts of the state, and yet it seemed like more invaders were coming from everywhere. Even if he wanted to defend, there were no more soldiers for him to muster.

"Anakin, what's the status on your side? You think you'll be done soon?"

"Nearly there," was the only response he got.

On Anakin's side, he was standing over the defeated body of one of the A.I. While many of them had organic bodies, he finally encountered one which had a body made from machines - or at least machines as identified on earth.

When the war started, young Anakin Indiana McClane was actually slightly scared. But once he got over that initial bout of fear, he discovered how liberating war really was. He had strength, and he had Rafael's guidance keeping him from messing up. All that was left was to have lots of fun.

"You know," Anakin said, as he brought his face near the robotic body lying on the ground, "I've heard the world's first computer virus was in Lahore, Pakistan. I know a Pakistani guy who lives in Queens, I wonder if I can get him to make a virus for you."

The A.I. did not respond, but only kept looking up at Anakin. In truth, the battle was already over, but Anakin had been looking for prisoners he could take. He finally found one that would fill his needs.

"I also have a Russian friend who is holed up near Brooklyn. I wonder if 30 terabytes of kinky grandma videos will slow down your processing or not."

The robot had no idea what Anakin was saying, but it got the feeling that it should be afraid. But Anakin was not paying attention to the robot's reaction, anyway. He had thrown his head back and was laughing maniacally, and the shadows in the surrounding area were trembling, as if laughing along with him.

Inside Anakin's soul, an old evil grandpa was watching everything, feeling the satisfaction of watching the younger generation grow up.

On another battlefield Rafael was controlling, Larry was fighting like a madman. Influenced heavily by Marlo, Larry had a deceptively sly battle style, relying on his inescapable control over metal.

Unlike Anakin's battles, where he occasionally took prisoners to study more about their enemies, Larry left no survivors. Most of the time, he left no corpses either.

The third battlefield was the most unusual. All the soldiers did not rush forward, and only held defensive positions while Souta alone fought all the enemies. After the death of his previous master, Souta had received a number of quests which involved gathering special materials which could be found in the invading aliens' bodies.

Once he completed the quests, and gathered the supplies, his system absorbed them and underwent an evolution, turning from a Samurai system to a Ronin system. The system had become much stronger, and thus, so had Souta.

The final battlefield... was Marlo's. Unlike the others, he had no soldiers backing him up. He was a lone soldier, facing the bulk of the invasion on his own.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 664: Traveling

Once again, Lex was riding Fenrir to pass through the bog. The area he was passing through right now was extremely dangerous, not because of the darkness or the monsters, but some unknown danger. Both Fenrir and Lex felt an extreme threat as soon as they neared, which was unusual for no such danger was mentioned on the 'map' they were following.

As such, Lex was at least reassured in knowing that he had managed to get his suits Geeves. He was not wearing his first suit, which Geeves had designed for frustratingly sturdy defense, but the second one, made from Orion's scales. The second suit was designed for stealth, and went even beyond the features the scales provided.

The scales could perfectly hide energy signatures, making it easy for one to hide from spirit sense and scanners, yet did nothing for visibility - that issue was handled by other features of the attire. The suit Lex was wearing, was styled differently from contemporary suits, and was more in line with the fashion trends of earth during the 19th century.

The color was an unusual blend, which would more easily allow Lex to completely disappear in even the mildest shadows, yet at the same time allow him to fall perfectly into the background even in completely illuminated environments. The pants were straight but smart, the waistcoat quite fitted to his body and a small bowtie. It was the coat that was most distinct as it required only the top button to be closed, for underneath it the coat slanted sideways, no longer covering Lex's chest, and transitioned into a kind of cape. Apparently the style was called a Frock coat.

Although it sacrificed a lot in terms of defensive capabilities, that was never really a requirement at all. Allowed to focus completely on stealth, Geeves was able to provide Lex with a suit that would allow him to disappear without the need for any spiritual techniques at all. Now that, on top of Fenrir's already impressive abilities made it so that Lex did not need to be worried about being detected. Yet still the feeling of danger persisted.

During this period the duo was extremely careful, and Lex was ready to enter his flow state at any moment. For once, his trusty and handy lenses failed him, in the regard that they were not able to detect the source of any danger.

But fortunately, 8 hours later, they left the area unharmed and uninterrupted. The days later, they finally left the bog and entered the Sentinel territory. Here, Fenrir's stealth would play an important role once again.

The Sentinel race could not exactly be called Xenophobic, as they had good relations with many races. Unfortunately, humans were not included among those races. The Sentinels were a humanoid race with extremely strong spirits but weak physical bodies. As it turns out, the resources they needed to then cultivate their bodies were often the same as those required by humans. In this matter, they were even more sensitive than humans, for they absolutely needed those resources. If they did not continuously strengthen their bodies, they would not be able to support their growing spirit. In the end, they would be bottlenecked and unable to grow.

The lack of resources and the competitive nature of cultivation ensured that the two races were never able to become allies. Even at their best, the two races were able to maintain a hostile neutrality, with countless small skirmishes.

There was a small note in the map stating that if Lex had a good relationship with the Sentinels, he could take a teleportation formation from one of their cities and skip a lot of the traveling he was about to face. Unfortunately, Lex had never developed a relationship with them, and thus would not be able to do that. Taking the longer route was his only option.

He would have to traverse the Sentinel territory into the unclaimed lands, which would be a stretch of territory where no sentient race had laid claim. Such lands were common, and could be either completely safe, or home to exceptionally strong or dangerous beasts. There was no real way of knowing.

The duo continued their journey, managing to avoid detection throughout. Weeks later, once they crossed the unclaimed lands, they faced a lake. Although it was called a lake, the body of water was larger even than the oceans on earth.

Crossing the lake was not hard as Fenrir was easily capable of running on water - or at least it was not supposed to be. Two days into their journey, a flock of Frio birds appeared in the sky and clashed with a nearby flock of Sol birds.

At first Lex thought that they were fighting, but it quickly became obvious that they... were involved in some kind of mating ritual. As happy as Lex felt for the local population of these massive divine birds, the results of their ritual were absolutely devastating!

A storm covered the lake unlike one Lex had ever seen. Boiling water rained from the sky, beginning to evaporate even as it fell. At the same time, snow and hail battered the lake as if they had a personal vendetta. The rapidly changing temperatures, from warm to cold, from cold to freezing to instantly boiling, and then back again completely confused even nature itself.

Massive tidal waves rose, but evaporated before they fell. The lake froze over, trapping even Fenrir where he ran, then erupted due to pressure accumulated due to the boiling water trapped beneath the frozen surface.

It was too much, and even Lex's powerful defenses were nothing in the face of nature's fury. Eventually they had to retreat to the Inn until the natural disaster that was that mating ritual ended. But even 10 days later, nothing seemed to change.

At this point Lex was beginning to feel desperate. His destination was too far, and time was running short. Moreover, every minute his workers were out on the battlefield, risking their lives for a fight that Lex thought was completely pointless.

In the end, unable to contain himself, Lex ended up back at the Infinity Emporium in an attempt to purchase a vehicle small enough to fit inside his spatial bangle, while also fast enough to make up for time that he had lost, and at the same time sturdy enough to withstand the accursed neverending 'mating ritual'.

As it turned out, there were a few options he could take, but they all left him unsatisfied. It was then that he discovered something. Possibly due to being spoiled by his own system, he realized that as incredible as the emporium was, it had a severe lack of rare or extremely impressive goods.

That was not to say their catalog was bad. Clearly it was great, for they had helped Lex numerous times already. But even their rarest items were never of the quality or type he came to expect from systems. For example, he still had not been able to find a cloning technique that satisfied him, but he was somehow sure that if he received a cloning technique as a reward for some SSS+ rank quest, he would be extremely pleased with it.

He was too used to one of a kind, overwhelmingly incredible items from his system. In comparison, normal rare items which could theoretically be found in the vaults of any large organization could no longer impress him. After all, that rarity was a result of limited market availability, and not because the item itself was actually incredibly rare and impressive.

Feeling spoiled in such a manner, in the end Lex bought a small 'jet' in the shape of a canoe. It had no thrusters or rockets or guns or anything of the sort, but came with an impressive shield that could block out even serious meteor impacts, and traveled really fast. It was not stealthy at all, and would cause multiple sonic booms on launch, but for now it fulfilled Lex's needs. He did not have the time to be picky.

In the end, Lex and Fenrir returned in their new canoe, only to discover that the storm ended literally minutes after their arrival!

Suppressing his agitation, Lex started the canoe and shot through the air. Fenrir tried to stick its head out of the shield to feel the wind but was nearly launched out of the canoe, and was only saved due to Lex. Moreover... the fur on its face had been pulled off as if waxed!

The traumatized pup immediately squealed and threw itself in Lex's lap and began sobbing. Lex tried to keep himself from laughing, for the sight was too hilarious. Also, he had to focus on navigating so he could not afford such a distraction.

Three days later, they arrived in the territory of a Trelop, where he could take his next teleportation formation.

Meanwhile, back in the Origin realm, almost a month had passed since the Midnight Battalion had been sent on their first mission.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 665: Warriors

On a continent covered in perpetual darkness by a thick curtain of clouds, the orange glow of molten lava illuminated an area clear of any and all vegetation. Only dirt, broken rocks and massive, pointed boulders protruding from the ground itself could be seen.

To call the region barren would be to praise it too highly, for this was a place abandoned even by death for countless years. Only recently, due to the intense conflict, had living creatures once again crossed this plain of desolation, and the reward for their transgression was to be hunted down mercilessly.

What followed then... was a war that gave even the most experienced soldiers nightmares. Whether it was the elves, the treants, the werewolves or the vampires, they all looked towards a particular battalion from only the corners of their eyes, almost flinching at the sight of them. They dared not look at them directly. They did not want to offend them. They also did not feel worthy.

There, on the precipice of an ocean of magma, stood 999 soldiers radiating an aura of pure and utter annihilation, purely honed and kept in perfect control. As ash and soot rained from the sky, they stood perfectly straight, their attire lacking even a single wrinkle or speck of dirt.

Whether it was when they laid siege to armies much bigger than their own, or as they ended a drought that had lasted many millennia by watering the ground in rivers of their enemies blood, or when they walked through flames or brought down behemoths that shook the ground with every step, their appearance remained pristine, as if to say that they were not putting in any real effort.

On this planet where everyone should have had similar power levels, so as to not destabilize the planet itself through too much destruction, they were an exception that totally destroyed the concept of power levels to begin with.

As if rising to the challenge that this battalion of impossibly strong soldiers presented, the Fuegan revealed a plot both sinister and malefic. Having prior knowledge of the valuable resources on this planet, and anticipating that the fighting parties would not want to sacrifice the planet, they populated the planet with deadly, artificially created aliens.

But the threat of those aliens, who were devouring and destroying the planet itself, was merely a curtain of deception to hide their true intentions.

Due to the Midnight Battalion's relentless assault, they chased the parasites of this planet even into these lands that should have been out of their way, followed closely by the allied forces. Here, they discovered a solitary temple, seemingly built out dirt and dead wood.

Within the temple they discovered a larva in the form of some kind of a vile deformity, still being nurtured in an amniotic sac made from the skin of beasts.

Surrounding it were numerous formations, feeding it with the aura of death, of pain, of agony, of catastrophe, all accumulated during this genuine world war.

But it was already too late. Although still not completely mature, upon being discovered the sac burst and the deformity was released into the world. With a wail that sounded like the misery filled screams on a trillion souls, the... the thing announced its arrival.

The planet itself seemed to almost fracture under that terrible cry, and suddenly every living being on that planet somehow knew that the planet was heading towards destruction.

Panic, fear, confusion spread not only on the surface of the planet, but also through the many ships surrounding the planet. Immediately the superiors decided to give up on the planet, and extract all their soldiers. They could not afford to lose all their elite. Once the soldiers were evacuated, they would kill the creature by destroying the planet by using weapons of mass destruction.

But, as if the creature's cry had opened Pandora's box, a meteor shower suddenly appeared out of nowhere, crashing into countless ships. After the initial strike, alien forces appeared in space, resulting in an impromptu space battle, leaving no ships free for evacuation.

Hopelessness and desperation spread through the surface of the planet. All the soldiers deployed on the planet were Foundation realm, but the newly born creature was already in the Golden core realm. Moreover, as it quickly burrowed down into the ground, eating everything in its path, its aura was rapidly growing.

The creature's destination was the core of the planet, its intentions clear. Perhaps this was only the first step in an elaborate plan the Fuegan had long prepared. The aliens, which had so far shown a distinct lack of unified intelligence, began coordinating impeccably to slaughter all the so-called 'elites'.

Although it was unlikely, since the creature had been born prematurely and wasn't at full strength, clearly the mastermind behind the scenes didn't want to take a chance and so wanted to occupy all the forces on ground in a fight for survival. This way, none could target the newborn.

It was then, during that most hopeless hour, when death was near certainty and all their efforts seemed for naught, that some noticed this single testament of indomitability. It was like a sword that would cut through the world itself if it came in its way. It was like the first ray of sunshine, pushing back the darkness even of the abyss. It was an unstoppable force that would tear apart any immovable object that came in its way.

It was the Midnight Battalion, and their increasingly fast march was their response to the wail of a trillion souls. They were making their way to the tunnel that creature had dug towards the core with the spirit of warriors that could not be defeated, could not be deterred, could not be swayed.

Just as some thought that perhaps there was hope, a tremor shook the planet, and molten lava erupted from the tunnel, like a volcano long stewing. The ripple of that explosion could be seen by the naked eye and the shockwave killed thousands.

But the battalion was not stopped for even a second, as they changed from 1000 soldiers into a single undefeatable mech. With noble purpose the mech dove into the lava itself, disappearing from view.

Across the planet armageddon seemed to have arrived. Tremors, storms, tidal waves, volcanoes and every other kind of disaster seemed to strike all at once. Scans from orbit seemed to show that the planet was on the path to exploding.

All hope was lost. This would be a grievous defeat for the allied forces. But then, the tremors seemed to slow down, their might waning. Then, shocking every living creature that saw the scene, the ground erupted once again. Yet instead of lava, a mech and a massive insect-like creature emerged from the ground.

With tens of thousands of small limbs the creature smashed the mech, and with a maw that could eat through planets the creature bit at it. Yet the mech was not only strong, but had deftness one could not expect from its massive frame.

Dodging each and every attack, the mech fought back, in plain view for all to see. Very literally, this was a fight to determine the fate of a planet.

The fight was devastating, to say the least. Even without the creature purposefully trying to destroy the planet, their fight seemed to put the planet in that direction. More and more lava erupted as the shockwaves from their fight seemed to break the tectonic plates, ultimately forming an ocean of lava.

Yet there was no reprieve or respite. There would only be victory or death, and clearly the result had been a resounding victory.

Once the creature was finally slain, the mech vanished in a cloud of smoke and the battalion was once again revealed. But, instead of the 1000 soldiers that had formed the mech, only 999 emerged.

With such a result, who would have cared. The price of a single life for such a victory was one any commander would be willing to pay. Yet it seemed everyone had misunderstood the situation. The 1 that was missing had not died, but had dove back into the lava as soon as the mech was dismissed.

No one knew his purpose, and when anyone asked, the battalion did not respond. Long gone were the amicable and friendly workers of the Inn. These were now the battle hardened soldiers who dared to steal life back out from the jaws of death itself, and they would not reveal the purpose behind one of their soldiers actions.

Eventually, even as the planet was cleared and evacuations once again began, they chose not to move, and not to retreat. Even the allied command, who had sent them onto this planet, ordered them to reveal what they were doing, but one of the soldiers, Gerard, simply told them to mind their own business.

It was only an entire day later that a single, still suited figure emerged from the lava ocean. The outsiders could not tell who it was, for all the members of the battalion had their faces covered, but they themselves knew who it was. It was Luthor, and when he emerged from the lava, he was radiating a much more powerful aura.

Clearly he had restrained himself and kept himself from entering a higher cultivation level, but even still stuck at the Foundation realm, he felt much stronger than before.

"Let's go. The next battlefield awaits."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 666: Little Devil

The 1000 soldiers seemed to be walking casually, but they smoothly shuffled amongst one another and came into their designated spots. While their gait remained nonchalant, they would be ready to react at the first sign of trouble.

From the moment of their birth, they had remained under the nurturing care of the Innkeeper, in the paradise that was the Midnight Inn compared to the battlefield that they had recently endured.

The battle prowess be what it may be, that did not change the fact that they were now living a completely different life and were exposed to horrors and difficulties they never could have imagined. Undoubtedly that put immense mental pressure on them. Who wanted to be on a dying, crumbling planet when they would be at the Inn instead?

Yet while they endured that pressure, their hearts never wavered. In fact, their determination to overcome these trials grew stronger. After all, they finally got a glimpse of the pressure the Innkeeper was keeping at bay for them. They finally saw first hand the trials the Innkeeper was facing alone, so that they would not have to. All they had to face were enemies near the Foundation realm, while the Innkeeper had to face the entire universe himself.

Through fire and fury and blood they renewed their resolution to grow stronger, and they did. Fighting side by side, ensuring that none of their brothers or sisters was harmed, they used this war as an anvil, and their enemies as the hammer which would shape them into the fiercest warriors. Of course, it helped that their suits made them immune to any damage from a foe at their level.

But that defense allowed them to survive their mistakes when they made it, and fix them so that they wouldn't make them again.

"Everything alright?" Gerard asked Luthor as he walked up beside him. Although they had supported his actions without question, no one actually knew why he had dived back into the lava.

Instead of answering directly, Luthor held up his right arm and conjured up a purple flame that seemed to come out of his arm itself, instead of just being summoned atop it.

"Near the core I sensed something calling me, so when I had the opportunity, I returned for it. I found a feather made of purple flames that merged into my body, and strengthened me. Apparently, I was extremely compatible.

"Information about my change appeared in my mind. This is the Purple Phoenix flame, a kind of special flame that is extremely destructive, and is born under extremely special circumstances. Of course, these are not real Phoenix flames, but that is just how it is named. By absorbing the flames, I have apparently activated my dormant physique, which is the Nine Nether Fire Body. I can continuously absorb special fires into my body, and once I've collected nine of them, they will merge and give birth to a new kind of flame."

Gerard was not surprised to hear this. Over the past month, many of them had not only awakened their bloodlines, but also other special powers. There were a few of them who had unlocked strange abilities that conformed neither to any cultivation method they were aware of. Once they were evacuated, they could request their commanding officer to give them special guidance from the allied forces training officers.

Since that would only raise their battle prowess, they would not be denied. Before they were sent to this planet, they had been briefed not only on what was expected of them, but the kind of support that they could get from the allied forces. Soon, someone with much more knowledge than them would come and teach them about the new abilities they unlocked, and how to use them.

"What's a 'special physique'? Any idea?" he asked, only mildly curious. He wondered if he had one.

"None whatsoever. But what I have figured out is the hidden reason the Innkeeper sent us all here. It may look like he was just agreeing to the demands of our hosts, who own this realm, but in fact, he just wanted us to use this opportunity to experience the universe for ourselves, and discover the direction we want to go in.

"In the safe and secure grounds of the Inn, we would never face the pressure that is required for us to grow. What do you think, Z?"

The teenager was walking behind them, seemingly distracted. His focus was on a floating 'ball' above his index finger. The ball did not exist, and seemed only visible due to the fact that light passing through it was bending across its surface. The 'ball' was also contracting and relaxing, like a beating heart.

Yet the beat did not produce a sound. Instead, it seemed to spread a ripple through space itself, one which could be felt not only through one's body, but in their soul as well. It was not really a sound as it was experienced and not heard, but at the same time it reminded one of the steady beat on drums.

A second such ball appeared above his middle finger, beating at a slightly faster pace. Together, the beating of the two balls produced a steady rhythm which tickled the memory of many of those around him. The rhythm was familiar, as if it was the beginning of a song they had heard, but could not exactly recall.

"Sure, whatever you say," Z replied, not really paying too much attention to Luthor. His focus was completely on the balls of distorted space he was playing with. Unfortunately, all of his prepared speakers broke within the last month. So now, he had to think of some alternative way of producing music. Apparently, bending space itself, before allowing it to partially return to its natural state produced a beat like drums. Now he had to figure out how to recreate the 'sound' of a guitar through space itself.

Although this was hard, once he was finished, he would be able to play his music inside a vacuum as well. That would surely help in space fights. He was looking forward to it.

Everyone around him chuckled, but said nothing. Over the past month, it was not Luthor or Gerard who had shone the most. Even with Luthor's upgraded power, he was not sure he could measure up to Z.

As if he were a protagonist of an anime, Z kept growing stronger at an exponential rate. Still in the Foundation realm, even without actualizing his affinity in his energy which only happened in the Golden core realm, Z was playing around with space as if it took no effort to distort it at all.

Although he was not the only one who had attained a space affinity, he was the only one who had mastered it to such an unbelievable level.

He was now stronger and more lethal than any of them, yet unlike the rest he did not gain a hardened and jagged aura from the month long war. Instead, he retained his childlike innocence, his slightly introverted and shy tendencies despite the fact that he had somehow become friends with almost all the workers at the Inn.

Without the music around to completely change how he behaved and fought, for a time, he had become extremely docile. After all, it was not in his nature to fight. He used the music to 'get him in the mindset' to fight. Without it, he was handicapped.

Until the last fight, in which he discovered the power of drums. Using only those, he unleashed the power of war drums.

What happened after that... well since he was the one incharge of the mech, the results spoke for themselves.

Among the other battalions who had seen him fight, and recently even among his own comrades, Z had gained a new nickname though he himself was unaware. Behind his back, and in whisper, people spoke about the Little Devil who hid his true self behind a camouflage of youth and innocence.

Not that anyone was complaining, since he was on their side. The members of the Inn didn't even take it too seriously. But in the allied forces, a file was compiled on the 'Little Devil', and sent up the command chain. It seemed even some superiors had begun to keep an eye on him.

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In the Crystal realm, Lex continued to travel across the lands that seemed to never end. Since it was not safe to cultivate in such an environment, even inside his 'ship', Lex mostly took this time to review his arrays. He also sent his projections inside the library in the Inn to begin studying.

The lenses were revealing a lot of information to him that he didn't understand, which only showed the depth of his ignorance. He had to remedy that as soon as possible.

Like this, another two weeks passed. After traversing various terrains and avoiding countless dangers, Lex arrived at the next spot he would take a teleportation formation. For some reason, despite his progress, an anxiety began to build in Lex's heart. He seemed to be feeling like... he was running out of time.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 667: Random events

The area he arrived at was not the territory of some noble, but instead a trade city established by some kind of sect. The sect itself was quite mysterious, and not many knew the details of their practices or purpose.

They were, however, quite accepting of everyone and everything as long as they obeyed the laws of their territory. Moreover, the sect would accept members of any race without compromising the unity that the sect members displayed. Why the members had so much unity was yet another mystery, and not one Lex was too interested in at the moment.

Lex was too distracted by the growing tension he felt. At first, he thought that the anxiety was normal. After all, almost two months out of six had already passed, yet he was not anywhere close to his destination. Sure, the teleportation formations would surely help and theoretically, he would arrive in the middle of the fourth month or early in the fifth month if all went well. This was the deduction based on the map. But there was no way of anticipating any problems he might encounter along the way.

But as the anxiety grew, Lex reassessed the situation and concluded that it was a hint from his instincts. He began deducing what issues he would encounter and how he could circumvent them.

In his mind, the feeling of running out of time was a result of him being on a tight schedule, which was the most logical deduction. After making a few contingency plans, he headed directly to the teleportation formation to continue his journey.

As it happened, quite coincidentally, at the exact same time, various seemingly unrelated yet incredibly important events were taking place.

In the Crystal realm, at that very moment, Aegis, the crown prince of the Hum nation, seemed to be in the middle of a devastating battle. As the foremost genius the Hum nation had ever produced, there were very few instances where he was beaten so badly, and all of them were at the hands of his own father. This time was no exception.

"Aegis, why are you doing this?" the King asked, somewhat exasperated. Was it not enough to rule the entire human race? Now he had to deal with parental issues as well.

Around the two was a battlefield, littered with the corpses of Kraven. They were deep within the territory lost by humans, so neither of them had reason to be there. Cornelius especially should not have been there.

"Why am I doing this? I think the question should be, why aren't you doing this? I am only seeking retribution for the losses we have suffered against the Kraven, and taking back what is ours."

"I have told you Aegis, you alone cannot face all the threats that humans face. The human race as a whole must become stronger. If they depend on the strength of a single man to keep them safe, they will once again fall as soon as that man disappears."

"Such a convenient answer, when it requires you to sit back and do nothing but let the humans die! Why train me so hard then, if you were never going to let me use my strength? You should have let me live in mediocrity."

"I am not doing nothing, I am raising the strength of the human race bit by bit! If you had obeyed my orders, and retrieved the cultivation technique of the True path, as I had told you to do, you would be doing the same."

"The cultivation technique of the True path? What's the point in pursuing a path that the majority of the human race cannot follow? That directly contradicts your statement about raising their strength as a whole!" At this point, Aegis was screaming at his father. Years of bitterness and resentment had mixed in with the new frustrations he felt as he began exploring the truth of the Crystal realm, under the hints of the Innkeeper.

He had already developed a few theories of the truth, but each one hurt his innocent heart more than the next.

Before Cornelius could answer, there was a flash of lightning, and with it, Aegis disappeared. In his stead, he left behind a few roaring words that echoed throughout the battlefield.

"WASH YOUR NECK OLD MAN! IF YOU HAVE SOLD THE HUMAN RACE, THEN I WILL BE BACK TO CUT IT OFF!"

Instead of being angered, Cornelius only sighed. It seemed his son was finally entering his rebellious phase.

Elsewhere in the Crystal realm, an army of Kraven was slowly marching out once again. Yet what was different between this army, and every other army that they sent out, was that each and every member... was an immortal! Hundreds of thousands of immortal Kraven were on the move, their destination unknown.

Back in the Origin realm, quite a few significant events were happening at the same time as well.

The allied forces, meaning the various forces who under the order of the Henali combined their strength to combat the Fuegan, were both unified in their mission, yet at the same time very disjointed in their chain of command. At least, that was the case with the allied forces operating in the Suera galaxy.

As such, a lot of information often went missing, and entire records sometimes disappeared. This was usually not due to any sabotage, but just bad logistics. Among the millions of orders being processed each minute, a file containing the deployment orders of the Midnight Battalion suddenly disappeared, and in its place, another file appeared with completely different orders.

At the same time, a file containing details of Z were copied and sent to an unknown destination, far away from the galaxy.

On Earth, the battle for New York took a drastic turn when a group of immortals suddenly appeared and surrounded Marlo. Yet facing certain death, Marlo did not frown, and instead grinned like a madman.

On his neck, the golden nano-talismans he was so proud of began to shine. The advantage of being known for stupidly intense brute strength was that people often forget that Marlo was also a genius businessman, strategist and an overall intelligent person. For a long time he had been wondering if he could create a spiritual technique that mimicked the effects of a nuclear bomb. If he could, then he'd be able to convert it into a talisman, right? It was time to see the fruits of his efforts.

In another place in the Origin realm, the Fiery Mammoths had officially sent a delegation to the central galaxy of the Jotun empire while unofficially they had begun to invade the galaxy neighboring theirs. True war was not their intention, so as long as their negotiations were concluded successfully, the situation would not escalate.

In another planet in the Origin realm, Bastet and Falak wore a depressed look as they were escorted into a jail cell. At their cultivation level, they were more or less at the absolute peak strength that the Origin realm would naturally allow, so the identity of their captor was extremely mysterious.

Even they did not know who it truly was, or what they wanted. After all, they had been overwhelmed the instant they were discovered.

Somewhere else, in the Henali portal, someone sent out an invite for members to join a book reading club. The venue for their meeting would be the Midnight Inn.

Elsewhere, far away from both the Origin realm and the Crystal realm, in one of the older and more complete realms, a group of four had encircled a single being.

The group consisted of a true dragon, its massive red body radiating unbearable heat, a gravin, a race equal to both dragons and celestials, a henali, and Kilgore, a beast completely unique in the universe with no other members of its race besides itself.

The being that was encircled was, surprisingly, a member of the celestial race!

What was more unusual was that, despite the celestial being a Daolord, looked like he was suffering from grievous wounds.

"Do you know what you're doing?" the celestial asked in a hoarse voice. "Do you think you can afford the consequences of harming me? There is no race more unified than the celestials! None of you will escape!"

"You should have thought of that before you messed with the Versalis Bank," said the Henali, showing no signs of remorse.

"Are you serious? You're all dogs of a bank?"

"Stupid celestial, don't you know the most important law in the universe? There is nothing more powerful than money!" Growled the dragon.

"The celestial race will never let you go!" the celestial said, anger and hatred filling his voice.

"We shall see," replied Kilgore.

Then, the group attacked once more. They did not ultimately kill the celestial, for that was easier said than done. They did, however, capture the celestial, and took him away. As soon as the celestial was delivered, their debts to the bank would be cleared. As for what happened afterwards, that was the bank's problem, not theirs.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 668: Destiny rank

Based on his previous experiences, Lex was prepared to face some kind of hurdle. But, unexpectedly, he faced no problems. He used the teleportation formation normally, like every other paying customer.

When he arrived at his destination, he traveled for a few more days on his ship before once again arriving in a neighboring territory where he could once again use a teleportation formation.

Such a trend continued for one more month. Not only did Lex not encounter any unusual problems, but he even came across a few people who were quite helpful. For example, he stumbled into a large caravan that was heading in the same direction as him. After paying a nominal sum, he accompanied them on their airship, which brought him to his destination a week ahead of schedule.

Another time, he reached a city to discover that the teleportation formation of that city had recently been upgraded, and could take him much farther than was in his original plan. Moreover, the owner of that city seemed to be married to one of Jasmine's siblings. As such, upon discovering Lex's token, not only did he expedite his journey, he took no money from him either.

Paying was not really a problem for Lex. As a result of his many trades at the Inn, he had accumulated well over a hundred million ordinary spirit stones. Paying a few thousand here or other made no difference to him.

During his long periods of traveling, he would send a clone to study various topics at the library so as to increase his knowledge. Since the Innkeeper was perceived as a powerful entity, Lex had to learn as much as possible about as many things as possible.

Fenrir could not do such a thing, but he was not bored either. Although Lex offered to leave him at the Inn, he wanted to travel as well. Even when he could do nothing else, he enjoyed looking out at the passing scenery.

During this period, Alexander once even asked Lex for help. Unfortunately, Lex could not afford any delays until he reached the Crystal realm, and so had to tell him he was currently unable to help.

He also got regular reports from Mary about the ongoing rumors at the Inn, as Velma still compiled the files she used to submit to the Innkeeper. The thing that interested him most was that apparently the war on earth had temporarily stopped, because apparently everyone was afraid that Marlo would destroy the planet.

There were no details to that rumor, yet somehow Lex did not doubt the authenticity of it.

At the same time, he discovered that Roland, the once newspaper boy back in the Crystal realm, had developed an extremely wide and vast information network that he used to supplement the Midnight Newsroom. Apparently, the entire realm was heading towards turmoil as no one was at peace.

Lex did not pay attention to such things, as he had other concerns. The several month long event that he had held was coming to a close, which meant that naturally he would lose all the security the event brought with it.

That naturally meant Lex needed to think of a new event. For now, he had the planning division propose some ideas, as he was too occupied to come up with and oversee a new event.

The good thing was that the Inns income had been quite steady, and during this period his savings had come to 350 billion MP once again. Basically, there was more than enough MP to continue doing events for a long time.

He also had to continue expanding the Inn, as more and more guests were starting to come. Lately, developing a large underwater city had been added to his agenda, as a lot of aquatic beasts were beginning to visit, and the small lakes and rivers he had across the Inn were beginning to get crowded.

But these were just on the agenda for now. He would deal with all this once he had enough time. At the current rate, it would only take him a couple more weeks at max to reach the Crystal nation, and then from there he imagined getting to Valesco should be easy. After all, he was expecting them to have a comprehensive transport system within their own territory.

The reputation of the strongest and most developed race of the realm required at least that much.

But it seemed that Lex's good luck eventually ran out. One day, while they were traversing a grassland in some unclaimed lands, during his last long distance journey for this trip, something happened.

The ship could not fly too high, and was traveling about 10 feet from the ground. Normally, that was enough to get them clear of any obstacles, but the grass in these grasslands was unusually high so Lex's visibility was null.

But such a mundane problem could not stop Lex as he just used his spirit sense to keep an eye on his surroundings, ensuring they were traveling in the correct direction.

But the distance his spirit sense could cover was ultimately limited, and he could not see too far away from himself. As such, he did not notice that he was heading directly towards a wall of rolling fog which seemed to be covering the grasslands. Perhaps, if his visibility was not blocked, he could have seen it coming. But even so, what could fog really even do? He could still navigate with his spirit sense, so it was unlikely he would have done anything.

But the odd thing was, even when he got close enough for his spirit sense to interact with the fog, he was not able to detect it. In fact, even his instincts failed to warn him that anything was approaching him, whether it be harm or not.

It was not until the ship flew into the fog that he actually noticed it. Immediately Lex became alert, though Fenrir looked at him with confusion. There seemed to be no threat, so why was Lex reacting like this?

The answer was simple. Although Lex was heavily dependent on his instincts, he was well aware that his instincts could not react to things related to systems, so he never dropped his guard. Naturally, if there was one thing that his instincts failed to interact with, there could be others.

Although the fog did not seem threatening at all, the fact that he was taken by surprise was a very alarming matter. In fact, even as he continued to travel through the fog, his spirit senses were unable to detect it.

"There's something wrong," Lex began to tell Fenrir, when he noticed something else, which was even more alarming!

The lenses could not detect the fog at all! In fact, even his right eye could not see the fog. Only and only his left eye, which had mutated, could see it.

Lex raised his alertness to the maximum level even as he turned the ship around to immediately head back. He was not concerned for his safety, as he could always retreat to the Inn. But if he retreated to the Inn, every time he would return to the Crystal realm, he would still be here. Ultimately, his quest to reach the Crystal race would suffer.

Yet despite his quick response, he was too late. The ship had been moving too fast, and even in the split second it took him to respond, it had already traveled through the fog, and come out the other side.

The sound of a massive crowd surrounded Lex, as a bright light blinded him for a moment. When he recovered, he discovered that they had entered a completely new area. An artificial 'sun' seemed to be shining a bright light, illuminating a vast, dry bowl shaped canyon filled with millions of beings.

In a single glance, Lex was able to spot humans, sentinels, poliods, trelops, the crystal race and even the Kraven among the crowd. There were a few fights going on, which was extremely natural when hated enemies were suddenly brought together.

The Kraven themselves had a warring nature, so every single Kraven was already fighting, and the extreme fighting prowess made it so they seemed to be winning. But even at a glance Lex knew that they would not survive long, for they were too outnumbered.

After all, among the millions here, there were so many races that Lex had never even heard of. The Kraven were just a few compared to all the beings here.

In the center of the canyon stood a massive tower built from white marble, and it was the only distinct feature here.

Lex had no idea where he was, or what was happening, but the first thing he did was to check his connection to the Inn. As expected, the connection was still there, for he heard the sound of a notification before he could even check.

New Notification: Host has entered a space sealed by a Destiny rank space lock. Teleportation facility unavailable.

The Innkeeper

## Chapter 669: Study

For once, Lex wasn't able to stop his expression from changing. Carefully, he read the notification once again.

New Notification: Host has entered a space sealed by a Destiny rank space lock. Teleportation facility unavailable.

"Mary, can you hear me?" he asked inside his mind.

"Of course. How can I help?"

Lex did not reply immediately, for he was currently analyzing his situation. He was connected to the Inn, still, but he was once again stuck in a situation where he could not teleport back. But unlike last time, where he was unable to teleport back because his system was too weak to carry out cross realm teleportation easily, this time it was because of something that locked space.

He analyzed his situation a bit further, not relying solely on his instincts for they had already proved that they were not reliable in his current situation. He had been teleported mysteriously to an unknown location, alongside millions of others.

Although he did not recognize many of the races, he had reason to believe that everyone of them had come from the Crystal realm. After all, while the Crystal realm boasted 7 major races that controlled the majority of the realm, it did not mean there were no minor races.

Subtle racial traits, as well as traces of different energy signatures led Lex to believe that everyone had been pulled to this mysterious place from across the entire Crystal realm instead of from just nearby where Lex was.

He also noticed that the majority of the crowd seemed to be gathered either near the tower in the middle, or the edges of the canyon. Moreover, they were 'near' these places only because there seemed to be some barrier keeping them at a distance. So that meant that they could neither leave the canyon, nor enter the tower.

Lex stopped his 'ship' from moving forward or he'd immediately reach the tower, which was not something he wanted. Getting off the ship, which was extremely prominent and eye-catching, and jumped to the ground. Until he had a better idea of the situation, he did not want to attract any attention.

He swept his spirit sense and observed some of the crowd near him. The crowd's cultivation level seemed to vary, and ranged from mortals, all the way to nascent realm cultivators. It was reassuring that there were no immortals, but they could also just be far away from him, or hiding. The fact that the crowd was so mixed meant that there really could be some immortals around.

He listened to the conversations happening nearby, and thanked the system for the universal translator for almost everyone was speaking in a different language entirely. It didn't take him long to gather that people had apparently been brought here only a few hours ago at most, yet no one knew anything.

"Mary, I seem to be trapped somewhere again," Lex told, feeling like he was living through a bad joke. Why was it that the first time he encountered an area able to completely block out all teleportation was when he was in a rush?

"That's strange," said Mary. "According to what I can tell, you should still be in the Crystal realm. There shouldn't be an issue teleporting out."

"I'm being blocked by a Destiny level space block. Have someone start looking up relevant information about that wherever they can. Moreover, I'm going to describe the area I'm in to you as well. Have Velma look into any information regarding it from the Crystal realm. Make sure to check old stories, myths and legends so that all possibilities are covered.

Lex described the area in great detail, though there really wasn't much to go on. He could only hope that he was caught in some usual and known phenomenon of the Crystal realm so that he could safely make his way out.

If there was no information about this place at all, there could only be two possibilities as far as Lex could tell. Either this was the first time such a thing was happening, or no one had ever made it out after entering this place.

Once he passed Mary the information, he let her be so that she could oversee the search while he himself began to study the area some more. His instincts were not picking up on any danger around him, but that could possibly be because they were being suppressed somehow.

He stayed away from all fights, and chose not to interact with anyone as he waited for a while. Fenrir too was looking around curiously, sniffing the air from time to time.

He waited for a few hours, but nothing seemed to be happening, except that more and more beings appeared in the canyon. Eventually he reached a conclusion that nothing significant would happen until either the canyon was completely filled, or that the canyon would continue to fill until something significant happened.

Tired of waiting, he decided to make his way to the edge of the canyon first, to investigate the barrier keeping them in. Moving should not have been much of an issue, for all the fights had ended by now, and the Kraven had been overwhelmed. Anyone else who was not smart enough to not antagonize millions of beings on their own also met a similar fate.

Unfortunately, Lex's bad luck seemed to continue as a new Kraven appeared in front of him just as he was making his way to the edge.

The familiar, poisonous stench of the black slime covering their body irritated Lex, so he did not hesitate to extinguish the Kraven by using Evisceration before it could even attack. The Kraven was only able to let out a single, painful squeal before it collapsed.

The surrounding crowd was shocked at what happened, then moved to keep a distance. Whether they wanted distance from the poisonous slime, or the intimidating Lex who killed a Kraven with one look, could not be accurately determined.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 670: Web

While Lex's feat of killing with a single look was intimidating to most, it in no way made him out to be overwhelmingly powerful. For example, Trellops within their own territories, were vastly more powerful than their realm should allow. But the few Trellops here had been plucked from their territories and dropped in the middle of nowhere, putting them at a severe disadvantage.

Usually, even if a Trellop left their territory, they would at least be able to summon some support from their territories. Yet now that they were in this mysterious place, they were completely cut off, and were at their weakest.

But not everyone had such clear weaknesses, for example the few members of the Crystal race who were present. Similar to how the crowd gave Lex a wide berth, so too did they avoid those ridiculously overpowered beings. As a race with guaranteed immortality, they had countless geniuses who revolutionized cultivation, or really any field that they were interested in, and then continued to do so since they wouldn't really die.

Moreover, due to the biology of the Crystal race, they really never suffered from depression as a result of their long, never ending lives. Sure, they got bored from time to time, and they would treat that by sleeping for a few eons.

As such, the cultivation system of the Crystal race was extremely well developed and since they could transmit information extremely easily, each member understood how to cultivate perfectly. Basically, there was no such thing as a weak member of the Crystal race, only ridiculously strong freaks of nature, and geniuses among those who surpassed all common sense.

Then, there were always a few geniuses in every race, some of whom had made their presence known in the canyon. Suffice to say, Lex declared himself as a powerhouse with his single move, but he was not the only one. Not that Lex really even cared about any of that.

The barrier blocking the edges of the canyon was being heavily bombarded with countless attacks and weapons, so it was quite a lively scene - at least to Lex. Beasts and creatures of all kinds howled and screamed. Fangs and fists attacked the invisible blockade. Rocks, bullets and balls of energy were all hurled or launched at it, spreading chaos and carnage in the surroundings, but the barrier itself did not even ripple.

The calm and casual Lex seemed an anomaly amidst such madness, but he merely stood there calmly as he looked at the barrier right in front of him. None of his senses could detect the barrier, save his sense of touch when he pressed his arm against the barrier, and his left eye that saw a massive wall of flowing flog.

After probing the barrier with basic physical strength, then channeling his normal spirit energy into the wall, Lex decided to take things more seriously. He used Impervious Hands, and immediately felt the difference.

The fog, which previously acted as an impenetrable wall, immediately became soft. He could dig his fingers into it, and even pull some fog out, though as soon as he tried to do it, his instincts immediately screamed danger! Fortunately he stopped in time, and did not allow his impulsive thoughts to land him in trouble.

He tried to see if he could achieve something by digging his hand into the fog, but the same sense of danger crashed down on him as soon as he tried. Ultimately, Lex decided to let it be, and go investigate the tower. Hoping for a quick and easy way out was wishful thinking to begin with. If he wanted to exit, he would have to play by the rules of this place, though he did not understand them yet.

When he approached the tower, he discovered, through his left eye, that the barrier surrounding it was not made of fog. Instead it seemed like an intricate web which would react to each and every person or attack made contact with it.

He noticed that sometimes the complex web blocking everyone's path would sometimes thin in reaction to certain beings, but never enough to reveal a path. Instead, when it was attacked the web would thicken and multiply, increasing the complexity of the barrier.

It seemed that they were supposed to somehow figure out how to cross the barrier on their own. When Lex touched the web, it seemed to thin as well, yet not nearly enough to cross. So he tried Impervious Hands.

This time, he discovered that he could easily move the web with his hands as he wished, either creating an opening or making the barrier thicker and stronger. For a moment he considered whether to create a massive opening and let everyone enter, or just enter on his own.

He did not know what the tower held, so it was a risk. He could either be bringing reinforcements with himself if a terrible foe awaited them, or be bringing in competition if the tower led to some treasure.

It all came down to how much confidence he had in himself, and how much of a risk he was willing to take. He looked at Fenrir, as if asking the pup its opinion, and saw only excitement and eagerness.

"Well, I hope I don't regret this then," he murmured as he pushed aside the web just enough to create a small opening. Before anyone could notice, he grabbed Fenrir and jumped through the hole, passing through.

The moment his hands left the web, the hole disappeared and the web regained its normal appearance. Immediately, the millions of beings trapped in the canyon fixed their gaze on Lex, and countless beings jumped after him to try and follow him, but to no avail. A stampede occurred as everyone wanted to try for themselves.

Countless hateful and angry gazes fixed on Lex, as if he was stealing from their ancestors' graves. Yet none of that was of any concern to him, as he walked into the tower. A part of him was glad he had put on his new, defensive suit. Whatever was about to happen, at least he was glad he didn't have to worry about suddenly becoming naked again.