

Innkeeper 671

The Innkeeper

Chapter 671: Tower

There was no opening on the tower that could serve as a door so Lex just approached its surface with the intention to see how Impervious Hands reacted to it, but the moment he touched the tower he disappeared.

The millions of beings watching were further aggravated as a feeling of falling behind filled them. Though most of them did not know what this place was or what approaching the tower entailed, it was clear that it was the only way to get out of here.

A few, however, clearly knew what this place was, or perhaps it only appeared that way since they maintained their calm even as the canyon was whipped up into a frenzy. It was a strange coincidence that all those who seemed to be 'in the know' were from the Crystal race, though not all members of the Crystal race seemed to be privy to this knowledge.

But despite the fact that Lex already disappeared, no other change seemed to occur in the canyon. More and more beings began to be dropped in, slowly filling up the entire canyon.

Lex, who had vast experience in teleportation, felt the familiar sensation of being moved through space, though this time was not instantaneous. A special kind of energy seemed to cover him, protecting him from the turbulence as this teleportation seemed to take a long time.

Unable to move, as his body was 'stuck' in the position in which he touched the tower, he decided to take this time to study the sensations he felt while being teleported. Since space was apparently one of his affinities now, he should learn how to make use of it.

If he only knew how much progress Z had made despite having a lesser affinity than himself, Lex might have blushed from shame. Fortunately, or unfortunately, they were as far from one another as they could get.

Using his spirit sense, soul sense and instincts, Lex continued to study space for what felt like hours before he finally appeared in what felt like an ancient yet grand courtroom. Lex immediately began to

study the room, failing to notice that for the first time, his connection to his system was suppressed. If he tried to contact Mary, for the first time, he would be unable to do so.

Everything in the massive hall seemed to be carved out of stone, from the floor to the walls and pillars, to the endless intricate designs etched over every inch of the room. In front of Lex, in the far corner of the room, was a kind of throne, once again carved out of stone. On each side of the throne were smaller chairs, as if to accommodate aids or advisors for whoever sat in the middle.

Despite the primitive impression the room gave, it also projected feelings of grandeur and an ancient power. It was not easy to make Lex feel like he was being judged, since he was the one usually doing the judging, but standing in this place, he felt like a mere plebeian waiting for his sentence. The cold, hard stone of the room reminded him of the days where he was just a mortal, and his existence was fragile.

Lex narrowed his eyes as he began circulating his spirit energy, his determination fighting against the oppressive aura of this place. Regardless of the circumstances, he would not accept being belittled. Although he had started out only pretending to be someone powerful and significant to play the role of the Innkeeper, he had slowly come to accept that he was far from ordinary.

He did not know if it was a good thing or bad, but he had developed a bit of pride. Even knowing his cultivation level was much lower than that of many, and that his existence could be a matter of no more than a whim for such beings, he could not keep himself from developing such a mindset.

As if rewarding his reaction, the aura in the room disappeared, and the chair became inviting instead of intimidating. It was as if the room was made specifically for his coronation, and he was to be awarded great honors as soon as he took his rightful place on his throne.

Lex was not really swayed by the changing pressures of the room, but as nothing else seemed to be happening, he approached it.

Soft, distant whispers seemed to fill the room as Lex walked, initially incomprehensible. Yet the further he walked, the clearer the voices became, up until he reached the throne, and the hall was filled with voices of various political figures, discussing the future of some sacred civilization.

Lex looked around and saw nothing, even as he felt people were talking right next to where he stood. Unable to stop his curiosity, Lex sat down and saw as countless figures appeared in front of him, garbed

in ancient cotton gowns in golden and silver colors. They wore basic, handmade jewelry, yet the impression they gave was of opulence and luxury.

Lex noticed almost immediately that their discussions never seemed to reach any conclusion, and they continued to debate quite audibly as if their very purpose was to make Lex aware of the situation based on the content of their conversation.

Simultaneously, a stream of information entered Lex's mind. The white tower he was in was an artifact that had existed from time immemorial and had played a role in the development of the entire universe itself.

The origin of the tower was unknown, and the exact reason for its existence was also unknown. What mattered was that the function of the tower was known, and in fact was directly transmitted to Lex.

Any time a group, or an organization, or a company, or a country, civilization, or race accumulated enough merit, and reached a turning point in their history that would either lead them to the pinnacle of success, or to an unprecedented nadir, the tower would automatically activate.

There was no explanation for what this merit was or how it was accumulated. What was explained was that the tower's purpose was to help the specific group as much as possible. Moreover, it would not randomly send people over. Each and every person who had been summoned to the canyon was specifically chosen by the tower, for they would have the exact specific skills or necessary expertise to help specific groups.

But just because someone had been chosen did not mean they would automatically be able to help. Entering the tower was the first hurdle. If someone wasn't able to enter, they would stay at the canyon till the specific group that needed their help would go through whatever situation they were stuck in.

The second hurdle was actually being able to help the situation once the tower brought them into the specific scenario. If they were not able to overcome the situation, they would never be able to return. The only way of returning was to help his assigned group successfully go through the turning point in their history, or survive the repercussions of failure.

Of course, he was not randomly hurled into an unknown situation. The tower arranged for an appropriate identity for Lex, so that he could seamlessly involve himself in the present circumstances.

Lastly, it wasn't as if there was no reward for the people the tower had summoned. If Lex was able to successfully navigate the situation and return, the tower would provide him with something he sorely needed.

There was too much about this situation and the tower that made no sense to Lex, but there was nothing he could do about it for now. Instead, he focused on his new identity.

As it turned out, the identity that Lex got from the tower... was the leader of a rising nation! Information about this nation, and the general information about the world was automatically provided to Lex. Moreover, information about the turning point was even specifically given to him.

This country, which was quite similar to ancient Egypt, was facing an unprecedented danger that they were incapable of overcoming. The country had formed a unique form of governance where their leaders and leader candidates were orphans, trained from birth to rule justly and without bias. There was no concept of inheriting power, at least as far as the ruler was concerned.

Moreover, their strict moral and cultural values made it so the country had excellent security and living conditions. As a result of a government and ruler who genuinely wished to benefit the country instead of accumulating their own power, the country rose up quickly, and their quick rise was also what attracted trouble.

With insufficient military and wealth that did not match their global status, they had been targeted by their three neighboring countries. Their existing leader had been assassinated, as well as all the orphans who were being trained.

As per the scenario set by the tower, Lex took the identity of the lone survivor who qualified to take the rulers position. He had, just now, been coronated, and in a few hours representatives for all three neighboring countries would arrive to offer 'condolences' and 'aid' during this difficult time.

The impending negotiations would forever determine the fate of this fledgling country.

Lex smiled. Was this supposed to be a challenge?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 672: Plans

Having understood the situation, Lex suppressed his curiosity and concern about the tower and began to absorb information about his surroundings. A quick scan showed that... everyone in the room was in the Golden core realm, though their cores seemed weak and frail in comparison to even normal cultivators, let alone Lex.

There were a few soldiers who looked extremely intimidating and had decent cultivations, but even those were in the minority. Most guards who stood around the room were in the Foundation realm, and even then Lex could tell they were far from outstanding. Any casual Foundation realm cultivator from Earth could suppress them one on one easily.

Although no one said so, Lex drew the conclusion that this country had a terrible cultivation heritage. It remained to be seen if this was the case in its neighboring countries as well, or just here. Suddenly a thought occurred to Lex: was he still in the Crystal realm? If he had to guess, he would say he wasn't as the ambient spirit energy was quite weak comparatively.

Then he began focusing on the conversations the people were having. The way in which they were conversing was extremely artificial, as they were discussing minute details about each ministry they oversaw. It was clear that, through their conversations, they were indirectly providing information to Lex about the various factors of the empire.

The most significant factor that Lex immediately realized was the military truly was lacking in this country. Due to excellent social services and economic support, scarcely was there anyone in the entire country who could not achieve a stable and successful life. In the scenario where everyone could easily achieve a comfortable life without much pressure, why would anyone be willing to endure the arduous life of a soldier? Only those who genuinely wanted to protect the country would take such a path.

Already he could tell this would be his greatest hurdle, as the martial incompetence of the country was more or less an established fact and known widely. After learning some of the details, Lex diverted his attention elsewhere. He was hoping they would have some geographic advantage, only to learn that most of the country consisted of plateaus or plains, as it was at the feet of a long mountain range inside one of the neighboring countries. While that provided a vast amount of fertile lands, there were few natural barriers except rivers, which was not really a problem for cultivators.

As time passed, and Lex learned more about this country, he realized that, without external intervention, this country was set to be a treasure chest, constantly raided and looted by external

forces. He did not even need to spare a single brain cell to come up with countless examples of colonists who occupied rich fertile lands, all to loot and pillage them.

If anything, he could not understand why this country had not suffered such a disaster before, and was even allowed to grow to the level it had already reached. After all, it already had three neighbors who could invade their lands.

To sate his curiosity, he began listening to the guy discussing the general history of their land. Slowly and steadily, he got an overview of the entire situation and came to the conclusion that there should be no way for it to overcome this crisis under normal circumstances.

This country, which was called Ferigo, was a piece of juicy meat dangling in front of a group of hungry street dogs. The only possible redeeming factor was that the neighboring countries were not overwhelmingly powerful either, and had conflicts of their own to resolve. It was only comparative to Ferigo that they were more powerful.

Adorning a look of absolute calm, Lex closed his eyes and allowed his figure to project confidence to all the various ministers in the room. In his mind, he was devising various strategies on how to overcome the situation. A lot of how he behaved would depend on the representatives and their respective plans.

Previously, Lex used to form a few plans in which he would take advantage of people's psychological blind spots and manipulate them based on having them form assumptions. But now, due to how fast and the vast experience he had accumulated in handling people, he could form multilayered plans and various contingencies.

Suddenly opened his eyes and looked at an old man who was in charge of the personal guard for the King. The man looked like he had aged considerably, and though he stood firm in his post and exuded an aura of blood lust, it was easy to determine that he had taken the assassination of the previous King as a personal failure. According to Lex's analysis, the old man had not purposefully failed in his duty, but the enemy had just outmaneuvered him. He could still be trusted.

Using his spirit sense, Lex passed the old man a few orders. Surprise and hesitation painted his face when he heard his orders, attracting the attention of everyone in the room, but he did not voice any of his doubts. He simply bowed to Lex and quickly left the hall to carry out his orders.

Perhaps before he would have offered resistance and council, but he had lost a lot of confidence lately, and could not bring it in himself to disobey orders.

Lex once again closed his eyes and resumed planning. The envoys from the neighboring countries would arrive soon, and everyone was waiting on pins and needles for their arrival. If Lex had arrived a little earlier, he would never have gathered everyone to wait for the arrival of a mere delegation. It put them in a weaker position. But it was already too late for that. He would salvage the situation as best as he could. In the meantime, he was already compiling a comprehensive strategy for military reform.

A few more hours passed, and the sun was nearing the horizon. The sky was filled with hues of orange and yellow, forming a beautiful tapestry hanging over the city which was engulfed in a mood of despair. The dichotomy of the situation was absolutely tragic. All the ministers, who had been waiting all day now, looked irritated and miserable and allowed a sense of helpless frustration to fill them. It was clear that while they all were noble people, focused on the benefit of their nation, they had little to no experience facing real hardship.

The door to the hall opened, and a messenger swiftly approached Lex and passed him a simple scroll. After taking a look, Lex nodded to dismiss the messenger, then turned his attention back to the ministers.

"All of you, take a seat. Make yourselves comfortable."

Confusion and hesitation filled their eyes, as they looked at one another, trying to determine if anyone knew what was going on.

"That was not a request, that was an order," Lex said in a cold, firm tone. "I do not have time to elaborate on my plans, nor can I afford for a poor performance from you to compromise the outcome. So, for now, all of you must simply obey my orders instantly and without question. The time for you to use your intellect will come later. For now, all I require is obedience."

This was far from Lex's usual style of doing things, as he was usually very considerate of his underlings. But the way he saw it, being firm was not the same as mistreating his subordinates. Moreover, he did not have a comprehensive understanding of their personalities and so he could not include them in his plans. As such, their only role would be to serve as an audience.

Upon hearing Lex's command, and feeling his subtle aura of oppression, everyone obeyed and took a seat. But just sitting did not change the fact that they looked extremely tense, and a glance was enough to determine their true thoughts.

That was where Lex's various experiences came into play. In the Crystal realm, back when he was in the academy, he was first introduced to the complicated ways in which nobles and higher leveled cultivators used spiritual energy and aura to build and hold prestige.

In the way that mundane humans wore regal suits and dresses, and styled their hair, applied makeup and used fragrances to establish a persona for themselves, so too did cultivators use their additional capabilities to embellish their image.

A person's aura itself could have a 'scent' which other cultivators could sense. The flow of energy in a room could affect its inhabitants the way a breeze could affect people on a hot summer day. Each and everything played a role in establishing oneself. Lex normally did not need to think of such things, as his Host Attire would automatically do all of these when he presented himself as the Innkeeper. In fact, the Host Attire probably even took care of various such subtleties that Lex was not even aware of.

But currently the Host Attire could not help him. It was fortunate then that he had long been studying these things so that he could seamlessly merge into higher cultivator society if he ever needed to.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 673: A Great Show

While Lex was planning out how to fulfill the requirements of the tower and get out of it, the Inn seemed to be running well on autopilot. All the staff was well trained and Mary knew what to do in most situations. Moreover, it had only been a short while since the connection between Lex and the system was blocked, so the chances of something going wrong were abysmally low.

Unfortunately, sometimes it did not matter how low the chances were. After the previous star rank upgrade, countless immortals had received just the push they needed to move up in rank. That had naturally led to a rain of lightning tribulations. There were naturally other tribulations but they were not as prominent as the lightning ones.

But it had been months now, so the frequency of tribulations had dropped drastically. The tribulations had not, however, completely disappeared. This was because the process of cultivation at higher levels

took a much longer period. It would not be surprising if there continued to be tribulations for many years still just based on the previous star rank increase.

Even among the tribulations, there were various levels. For example, the tribulation that Ragnar had faced had been the most devastating so far, due to his incredibly high cultivation level.

Now, it just so happened that mere minutes after Lex's connection was cut, one such tribulation once again started to arrive. Lex had already reinforced all the tribulation rooms with formations and protections similar to the one Ragnar faced, hoping it would be enough to contain the destruction. Now, it would be put to the test.

Lex's spirit energy swept through the hall as he used various spiritual techniques to influence the environment. Slowly, the overwhelmed ministers began to notice that, despite their own lamentable state, the atmosphere in the room began to change. Soon, it no longer felt like this was a hall where they were waiting for a death sentence. Instead, it felt like this was a grand hall, befitting a great and glorious King - one who was the ruler of a strong and prosperous nation.

Instead of handles and chandeliers, the room had large metal bowls which contained fire to light up the room. As if it had been injected with the perfect kindling, the flames grew into a larger blaze that nearly overflowed from the bowl, projecting its brilliant orange light across the hall.

A breeze seemed to blow in the hall, taking away the stale air and bringing in with a subtle scent of vanilla. It also seemed to blow away any and all dust and dirt that had accumulated in the hall, leaving it immaculate.

The ministers watched bewildered as the changes swept the hall, and were taken by complete surprise when the energy in the hall gathered around themselves as well! Their appearances seemed to change subtly!

Their wrinkles seemed to fade or disappear entirely, and their skin seemed to tighten. Though the skin did not suddenly become clear, it did look fresher. Their clothes did not change but somehow seemed to appear more grand than mere moments ago. Even their auras changed, and they went from being anxious and concerned to being completely relaxed and yet dignified.

The hall, previously a theater where a performance of nations was to take place, had become the court befitting someone who was to be called majesty.

The next change was amongst the soldiers. They stood at guard with their backs to the walls, facing the hall. Of the entire group, they were actually who needed Lex's help the least. Weak though their cultivation may have seemed in Lex's eyes, it was not for a lack of resolution or bravery. Their rough, tanned skin, their rippling, chiseled muscles, their firm, focused eyes all spoke of men who had faced the trials of battle.

Amongst their own ranks, where everyone had cultivation techniques of a similar quality, they were champions.

As such, they did not really need much bolstering. But Lex did it anyway. Their auras strengthened till they became suffocatingly overwhelming, and then he suppressed it to their bodies. If no one looked at them, they would not even know of their existence. But if one looked in their eyes, they would feel the full force of their augmented aura.

Some of these effects had been brought about by the various spiritual techniques Lex learnt and some, such as the breeze carrying vanilla scent, had been done by arrays. Even though Lex had learnt about such things, he had not gone into too much detail, so for now this is all he could really do. Although it might seem impressive to an outsider, he knew that those who considered themselves true nobles among cultivators took things to levels unimaginable to an outsider. But for Ferigo and its neighboring countries, which seemed somewhat lacking in regard to cultivation, this much should already be more than enough.

"When the envoys arrive, do not say anything, or interfere in any way," Lex commanded, his voice still just as firm as before. "Just pretend as if you are watching an interesting performance."

Lex swept his gaze over the ministers to judge if there was still any hesitation or reluctance in them, but found that his performance had thoroughly subdued them, and that though they were still confused, they chose to obey without delay.

Lex nodded gently. Though they had been made to wait nearly an entire day for the envoys, they had arrived precisely during the golden hour, making everything the sun touched even more pleasant to look at.

Lex looked down at himself and found that, instead of his suit, he was wearing a majestic robe of gold and white. Although he preferred his own attire, he supposed being dressed according to the situation was more important.

The doors leading to the hall suddenly produced a loud creak before being swung open by the guards station outside.

"Presenting the envoys from Solis, Havi and Nefario," he said loudly, announcing the identities of those who were arriving.

Three men, two who could be considered a little chubby while the third looked quite slim and fit, walked in followed by a number of retainers. The group had three distinct dressing styles so it was easy to distinguish which countries they belonged to.

Based on the knowledge he had acquired Lex could easily identify which group belonged to which country. Normally, based on his knack for hospitality, Lex would have stood up and warmly greeted these new guests. But, considering his current circumstances, he did not.

In fact, not only did he continue to sit, though he of course maintained excellent posture, he also tracked the group's arrival with his eyes, an amused smile on his lips.

"Forgive us, your majesty, for arriving so late. We came as soon as we heard of the awful attack," said one of the chubby men, the representative for Solis.

Before the man could continue his, no doubt, prepared spiel, Lex interrupted him.

"There is no need for apologies. Your poor infrastructure and lack of roads is common knowledge. The fact that you still managed to arrive so quickly speaks greatly of how you must have rushed to arrive after the incident."

Lex's voice was quite calm and even had a hint of praise, as if he was complimenting a child on trying his best.

The envoy from Solis froze momentarily, as his eyes bulged. Despite also being in the golden core himself, it took almost an entire second for him to get over the shock of open insult he had just suffered, as well as the veiled condescension.

It was true that their countries did not have many roads linking their various cities, especially if they were far from one another. So then, how could they possibly have roads heading towards Ferigo? All they had was one major road that was used for trade. After all, cultivators could easily make do without such things, so there was no need to waste money investing in them. The fact that mortals suffered greatly as a result was of little to no consequence.

The comment about their quick arrival was the most shocking. Though the King claimed to be praising them for their quick arrival, it was a fact that they could not have arrived so quickly if they had indeed departed after the incident happened. He was clearly making fun of their poor attempts to veil their involvement, or knowledge of, the incident.

The reason why he was shocked the most was because this was not the reaction he was expecting from Ferigo. Not only had they suffered a devastating loss in terms of leadership, they were in a weaker position, especially when facing all three countries at the same time. They should have been the most cautious, yet instead their King immediately broached the most sensitive topic as soon as they arrived, completely unafraid of offending them.

As envoys, they were naturally smart and trained in diplomacy. They immediately realized something was amiss, and that they might have possibly fallen into some trap.

It was at that moment that the three envoys suddenly realized that in the hall they had an audience. All the ministers of Ferigo had gathered, and were sitting in the corners of the room, as if they had come to watch a great show.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 674: Bandits

Countless thoughts surfaced in their minds as the three envoys tried to explain what was happening around them. Though they were shocked, and they could not explain why the newly appointed King was acting so fiercely, it was a little early to jump to conclusions. As it was, they were the ones who held the upper hand in the situation, for all three countries had a united stance on the matter. Regardless of

whatever they were plotting, the downfall of Ferigo was already determined. The only thing that remained to be decided was how costly it would be for the three countries.

"When we heard of the situation, we spared no expense to hurry to your aid," said the envoy from Nefario, the slim man of the three. "After all, with the limited military of Ferigo, no one was certain if you would be able to survive without aid if you suffered more of such attacks."

Lex's smile widened just as bit as his gaze fixed on the man speaking. Compared to his companions, the envoy from Nefario was clearly more competent and quick-witted. His explanation for Lex's previous remark pointed out Ferigo's weak military, as well as the fact that its current existence relied on the three countries' grace. The moment they decided to attack Ferigo, it would not survive. In fact, the whole point of this meeting was an attempt to get Ferigo to peacefully allow the military of the neighboring countries to enter, and peacefully hand over its cities. All of this would be done under the guise of protection and military aid.

This way the three countries would not have to invest in a campaign against Ferigo and win all the prizes, while the current King himself would be allowed some concessions for allowing such an easy handover. He could become a minor noble or something, and live out his days in luxury.

The way the envoy saw it, the King was not trying to trap or attack them, but was merely building up his own importance before the negotiations began.

To Lex, however, this was only an amusing attempt to maintain control. He had no intention of playing by the rules.

"Yes, indeed, the security in Ferigo is atrocious lately. There are bandits attacks and raids everywhere. I'm glad to see you arrived without incident."

Despite the envoys goading, Lex retained his casual tone, and did not hesitate to lace his concern with sarcasm. While the ministers were confused, for Ferigo never had any problems with bandits, the envoys too were confused. The King blatantly admitting to having to suffer at the hand of bandits was actually weakening their position.

But the thing was, Lex never intended to negotiate to begin with. Relying on the mercy of others would forever mire Ferigo in a weak position. The solution he had come up with to resolve this issue was not to intimidate them, or even get on their good side. It was instead to turn them against one another.

The reason he had mentioned bandits was because of a plan he had set into motion even before the envoys arrived. He ordered his general to have his strongest unit dress up as bandits, and on the way back ambush the envoys party as they return.

But how could the strategy Lex took so much time thinking up be so simple and straightforward? It would be obvious to anyone that the 'bandits' were not really so due to their strength and training. The real plan would be implemented when the envoys, who would just barely push the bandits back, would actually discover - by accident - that the bandits were actually soldiers from Havi!

But then again, just that would not be enough to throw suspicion their way, so Lex had already arranged for some of the retainers from Havi to be poisoned, and to make it look like normal travel fatigue. The envoy of Havi would naturally have to stay back until his retainers recovered, conveniently missing out on the ambush.

Now, with some evidence and a convenient coincidence keeping the Havi envoy from being attacked, the suspicion pointing towards him would be greater. But suspicion was not enough, he needed the others to be certain of their guess.

It was at this point, one might beg the question, why was Lex targeting Havi instead of Solis or Nefario? Weren't they all equally susceptible to taking the blame? Did he then choose the country randomly?

The answer was no, he had targeted Havi specifically because of the complex socio-political history of the region. Havi shared a border not only with Ferigo, but also with Nefario and another country. Up until recently, relations between Havi and Nefario were tense because there was a Blazing-iron mine close to their borders. They often had skirmishes and small disputes to contest the ownership of that mine, until it was eventually completely depleted.

With bad history already existing between them, all Lex needed to do was plant the idea that Havi was secretly conspiring with Ferigo against Nefario, at the expense of Solis.

Then, through a series of 'coincidences' and misunderstandings, he could sit and watch as the three countries tore each other up. All the while, they would not be concerned about Ferigo which was apparently continuously being weakened by 'bandits'. They could take care of it when they settled matters between themselves.

That would give Lex enough time to begin implementing a series of military reforms which would not only strengthen their army and martial culture in the country, but ensure that full control of the army stayed with the King and did not fall into the hands of some generals.

Of course, Lex was not going to be around to see all this. He would just make the plan and set the wheels in motion which would lead to the dominance of Ferigo in the region in close to a couple of decades.

"Even if you have bandits, seeing us flying the colors of our countries, they would never dare to attack our delegation!" the envoy from Solis said boldly and with arrogance.

"Indeed. They would be completely crazy to attack all three of you together," said Lex with a soft smile.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 675: Finishing up

"Your majesty, clearly the situation in Ferigo is extremely dire," said the envoy from Nefario, wearing a solemn look. "Let us not waste time and directly deal with the matter at hand. A hidden force has taken action against Ferigo and assassinated your predecessor, as well as many of your peers. While we currently suspect demonic cultivators from a rising demonic sect, we cannot deal with that matter until the situation here is stabilized. You yourself have claimed that Ferigo is even having problems with bandits. The situation is going from bad to worse.

"The noble nation of Nefario is already dealing with the savage beasts that constantly invade us from the neighboring Mystic Forest. We cannot afford a neighbor becoming a den of criminals and demonic cultivators, as that will cause us to divert resources away from the forest. As such, the royal family had decided to act preemptively. So long as you give us permission, we can have three battalions cross the border and help stabilize the situation here. We can route out the criminal element and investigate the demonic cultivators, all while keeping the citizens of Ferigo safe."

"The nation of Havi is also ready to pledge two battalions."

"Solis can also send in four. Fear not, we will not allow evil to fester in these prosperous lands."

"How magnanimous," said Lex, as if he was really praising them. Yet the look on his face, and the tone of his voice said otherwise.

"I'm afraid even if I were to accept your help, it would not be so simple for your armies to come in," he said, looking at the envoy from Nefario. "It seems a mortal trader who was using the river to cross into Havi transporting a shipment of Red Lily powder was attacked by bandits as well. As a result, the entire shipment was destroyed and the river was polluted with the powder. The entire river has become a quarantine zone and the cleanup process will take a while."

Although the river was heading from Ferigo to Havi, it crossed the border of Ferigo before heading there, so the excuse was quite believable. Moreover, Red Lily powder was an extremely unstable compound which was used in the production of various medicines, but on its own was quite poisonous.

On the surface, everything seemed fine. But besides making medicine, Red Lily powder could also be used to make an extremely strong irritant which was known to drive beasts crazy and attack with abandon. Nefario, as a nation, was quite sensitive to anything that could aggravate beasts, for they faced attacks from wild beasts throughout the year due to the border they shared with the Mystic Forest, a forest that was home to an endless number of wild beasts.

In truth there was no such contamination, at this point at least. Lex had ordered the powder spilled into the river, also through his newly established 'bandit unit'. Although agriculture in Ferigo would suffer because of this, so would Havi. Moreover, Nefario would begin to suspect Havi was creating those irritants to aggravate beast attacks against it. It was a win-win.

This time, Lex suppressed his smile, as he was supposed to have no idea of the insinuations of the powder, and was merely pointing something out. The envoy had to believe he uncovered this plot on his own.

With such a start, the meeting with the envoys went on for hours. Though they made no headway with Ferigo itself, countless conspiracies had been subtly uncovered during this time, slowly affecting the unity that the envoys came with.

They studied one another from the corners of their eyes, and took mental notes to report as soon as they returned. By now, they were not even thinking of the merit they could gain by bringing this information home. Instead, they were worried about the imminent war that seemed to have been brewing on their borders, all without their knowledge.

The envoy from Solis, which was the richest of all the countries here, slowly began to believe that in truth, Ferigo, Nefario and Havi all were secretly working against it, and in actuality planned to ambush the four battalions they were originally planning on sending.

The ministers, on the other hand, mostly had no idea what was happening. They only kept wondering if they had missed out on some important news, for they had no idea about half the things the King mentioned.

Like this, the first day of negotiations ended, and the envoys were escorted, separately, to their quarters. A full night would be plenty of time for them to reflect on what they had heard today, and begin drawing conclusions. In the meantime, Lex inspected the poison to be sent towards the Havi retainers. It seemed quite potent.

With a smile he nodded his head, and then returned to the hall to have a meeting with the ministers. During this night he had to pass on the plan for developing their country for the next few years so the direction of their development would focus on the right path.

As for the continuation of the meeting with the envoys in the morning, it would never happen. When they woke up, they would be delivered news that due to the declining situation, Ferigo had entered under martial law, and the King had already left to command his armies against the bandits.

That would be enough for them to understand that Ferigo did not intend on cooperating, leaving them no option but to depart, and quickly.

The reason Lex was doing all this so quickly was because he was certain that as soon as he set things up enough, and put all his plans in motion, the tower would consider his task complete and pull him back. He did not have time to waste on such stupid things as babysitting a country.

Speaking of which, he wondered what happened to Fenrir. He had entered the tower with it, but had been separated afterwards. Was it also sent to save someone by the tower?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 676: Providence

A full moon illuminated the land with its gentle, silver light, yet the massive trees in the forest blocked the light from reaching the forest floor. Only a few scant, thin streaks of light reached the ground. Shadows flickered through the silver streaks, one after another, as a wolf pack ran through them.

An abnormal silence took hold of the forest wherever the wolf pack passed, as even the crickets singing in the night froze out of fear. A war for territory was being waged between the Bark Brown wolves and the Winged leopards, and the collateral damage had already claimed countless lives.

Such a thing was quite common in the Mystic Forest, for the forest had an unusual effect on beasts. Often, a seemingly mundane and ordinary beast would randomly undergo a mutation or unlock a deeply hidden bloodline, thus becoming more powerful. With its new status, it would naturally have to expand its territory, and would begin a search for a suitable area.

Survival of the fittest was the rule that dictated the forest, and with the forest's perpetual augmentation of beasts randomly, the fittest were often tested.

One would think that with such never ending fights, the population of beasts in the forest would plummet, but for some reason, that was far from the truth. In fact, the population of beasts would often grow so high despite the constant fights that beasts would be forced out of it, and end up invading the neighboring lands occupied by humans.

None of that mattered to the wolves, though. Whatever secrets the forest held, whether it was why the population of the beasts never fell, or why some beasts randomly grew stronger, could not concern them even if they unlocked a higher intelligence. Such concerns would only bother those who did not have to struggle to survive every day. What did it matter if there was some conspiracy at large, if they could not survive to see tomorrow?

The fight with the invading Winged Leopards had put a lot of pressure on them, and their pack almost considered migrating somewhere else. But then, a new, younger and more powerful pack leader arrived. Under its leadership, not only did their own casualties dwindle, they even began to retake some of the territories they had lost.

At the front, Fenrir led the way, its abilities muting the sounds of the pack as it traversed the forest. Although the wolves in the pack it was leading were not dumb, Fenrir's own intelligence far surpassed them. Despite its inability to speak, Fenrir had a deep understanding of strategies and formations. Moreover, it was constantly being influenced by Lex, so it knew how to frustrate its enemies to death.

But, for once, it had surpassed Lex in a certain aspect. While Lex had sped through his mission designated by the tower, ensuring the best outcome in the least amount of time, Fenrir was taking its time. That was because it noticed something as soon as it became the pack leader. The worship and obedience of its pack had somehow activated Fenrir's bloodline on a deeper level, and it began to unlock the true powers of its bloodline.

It did not know if this was a result of the forest's unique quality or being the pack leader, but it knew that it had best utilize this chance to the best of its abilities. Comparatively, Lex was in too much of a rush to exit to consider any possible benefits he was receiving, let alone the fact that he was not really attracted by random benefits at the moment, either.

As a result, he had not noticed at all that while he was in a position of leadership at Ferigo, similar to how he led the Inn, his leadership styles in both situations were extremely different. At the Inn, he was more or less mellow, and took things slowly. He also could not use his workers the way he used the soldiers of that country. In comparison, in a single day he changed the destiny of the entire nation by being more strict with its policy and its people.

Although it could not be claimed that Lex was cold-blooded and emotionless when designing the future policies for Ferigo, he certainly did not shy away from putting them in harm's way to get the best results.

He was completely oblivious to the drastic difference in result a simple mindset change had brought about. He could not be blamed for it though, as it was the hardest to pick out flaws in one's own behavior without it being pointed out. After all, everyone always assumed they were behaving the most logically, given their circumstances.

After Lex concluded his final meeting and dismissed the final ministers, as he expected, he was teleported away. He did not know how the ministers of Ferigo would behave after his disappearance, or how they would handle the selection of a new King without interfering with his established policies, but that was not his concern. The tower would take care of it.

After being teleported out, a stream of information entered his brain. The first thing he learnt was that the tower was called the Tower of Providence, and it had a very specific purpose. While entropy was the

nature, or rather one aspect of the nature of the universe, it was not the nature of life. The tower worked against the forces of chaos to give the worthy a chance of survival. Although the effects of its efforts were extremely subtle on a universal scale, they were surely there, and guided the direction of the universe with a gentle hand.

Such things were too far removed from Lex and were too abstract for him to comprehend or deal with. All he cared about was how to leave. But the tower was not done yet. More information entered his mind.

Having completed the objective of the tower, Lex had now become an agent of providence and had become connected to the tower. Their relationship had only just begun.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 677: Lament

Lex suppressed a groan. He had lost count of how many universal entities he had established a relationship with. The Midnight Inn was obvious. Then there were a number of Daolords and Demi-Dao Lords. Then there was the Henali. One could not also forget the mysterious man who suddenly showed up inside his room one day. He should also not forget that he had an unknown enemy out there somewhere from whom he had stolen Fenrir - he had no idea what level that guy was at.

There were also a number of systems he had been skirting around but avoiding getting too involved with such as the Emporium and Reaving Dread mercenary group (the group through which the Inn hired extra guards for its events).

As if all of that was not enough, now he had to deal with this Tower of Providence. Once he was done lamenting, he turned his attention back to the information he received. He had completed a task for the tower, so in exchange the tower would reward him, and at the same time make him one of its agents. As an agent, a connection between him and the tower would be established, and he could apply to complete another task whenever he wanted. As a result, he would continue to be rewarded. Moreover, the rewards would not be random, but would be what he needed most at that time.

If he chose to not take up any missions on his own, once every 100 years the tower would randomly summon him to complete another task.

Looking at it objectively, this wasn't such a bad thing. In fact, if other people encountered such a thing they would consider it their lucky break as they had encountered a fortuitous opportunity. Who would say no to being rewarded exactly what one needed most at the time?

The thing was, Lex was really too busy to care about such things. Moreover, he had numerous ways to get great opportunities. Even if his quest rewards weren't counted, he could always just go fishing inside the Well at the Inn.

As such, he really couldn't be bothered. It was like a multimillionaire who was forced to attend tedious meetings unrelated to his main business. Sure, he would be rewarded a few hundred thousand dollars now and again, but when compared to his main priorities, it really wasn't worth it.

But, since it really wasn't in his control, he stopped brooding and turned his attention to his reward. Since it was apparently the thing he needed most at the moment, it would surely be great, right?

Considering he was once again in the process of being teleported, and could not really move, he could not directly investigate the item that had landed in his hand. All he could do was check the information on it, which had also been sent to his mind.

It was a golden color translucent ball which acted as a container for an extremely precious and rare item called Taro's Fertilizer. It had many uses, all of which had been listed systematically. The one that was most relevant to Lex, however, was that it drastically sped up the sprouting of a Realm Seed. Without it, the Realm Seed would take over a million years to sprout, but with it only a few months would be needed.

Lex froze. Well, technically he was already frozen in space, but now his mind also froze. The Realm Seed would take over a million years to sprout normally? Why didn't he know this? Was this something the system would have taken care of, or was it something he would have had to figure out on his own?

Logically, if one thought about it, it made sense. A normal realm was no small matter, and was different from the Minor Realms which were found everywhere. So for one to be created, it made sense that it would take a long time. But considering that the reward was from the system, he did not think too much about it.

Now... it appeared as if things weren't so simple. Fortunately, he had run into the Tower of Providence, and received this reward. It really was the thing he needed most right now.

He spent the remainder of his time considering if there were any other misconceptions he had about information given to him by the system. He had been misdirected so easily, despite the fact that he had his guard up.

Once the teleportation finally ended, Lex found himself on the grassy plains through which he had been teleported away to begin with. He looked around to search for Fenrir, but did not find him. He was not too worried though, since according to the connection he had with Fenrir the pup was fine. He would have to leave it behind, as he didn't have time to wait around for it, but as soon as it finished its task in the tower, Lex could directly summon it to himself.

Next, he checked up on the system to ensure everything was fine, only to discover the abnormally powerful tribulation taking place! He was instantly reminded of the tribulation Ragnar underwent, and began adding additional protective formations around the tribulation room!

This was insane. The power of these stronger tribulations was too much for him to bear at the moment with the facilities he had on hand. Maybe, in the future, he should set up a restriction on the level of guests allowed to attend the Star rank upgrade ceremonies.

Curious, he checked the identity of the person undergoing the tribulation, and discovered that it was the devil that Ragnar had challenged.

His name was Warheil, and he seemed completely unbothered by the lightning that was ferociously striking his body. He was sitting casually with his legs folded, as if it was not something worth considering at all.

A solemn look entered Lex's eyes. This devil... was too powerful. Ragnar's performance was already impressive when he broke through, but this devil was even stronger.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 678: Out of time

Ragnar's tribulation, as Lex recalled, consisted of a single black lightning strike that destroyed almost every protection he set against it. Over 10 billion MP worth of protective formations had barely been enough to contain its awesome might, and in a sense, it had still failed. That was because the lightning strike had caused everyone to undergo a hallucination.

While the hallucination itself was quite an experience, and provided many with a unique insight into facing tribulations, he did not want the incident to repeat. After all, many guests were either swimming, driving, fishing or doing other tasks, an interruption during which could cause serious harm. After all, there was even an area for guests to learn the dao of the sword from Qawain at the base of the Midnight Mountain. An unfortunately timed interruption could cause serious harm.

As such, Lex had specially put formations that block spirit based attacks around each abode. But what he could not do was afford to put 10 billion MP worth of formations around each abode, so what he did was simple.

Since he had unlocked the feature of 'Room Creation' when he was tasked to design the tribulation room, he tweaked each and every room he had. As soon as any room sensed a tribulation, they would automatically begin setting up protective formations around itself. Since this did not qualify as a service to the guest, since the room was protecting itself and not the guest, the price did not increase. As a result, Lex would be the one who had to pay.

When he thought of the idea, Lex felt like a genius. Now though, he realized it was not so smart.

This devil's tribulation, while similar to Ragnar's, was also different. There was black lightning, yes. But somehow, it did not seem as dangerous. Yet at the same time, instead of a single strike, there were multiple. He did not know if the overall difficulty was decreased, increased or stayed the same. Yet he could tell based on the massive bill he had accrued that he definitely had been screwed over!

Already 13 billion MP had been spent, and the tribulation was nowhere near over! But the higher expense did not reflect the true difficulty of the tribulation. This was because when Lex chose the formations himself, he would select formations which would support one another, thus allowing each one to absorb more damage.

The formations chosen by the room itself were completely random. As long as their function was to protect the room, it would suffice. Shaking his head, Lex immediately took over and changed the formations. At the same time, his capitalistic gleam was revived.

"Mary, inform someone from the Jotun empire. The devil that Ragnar challenged to a death match is about to be free. So long as he accepts, their match can be conducted."

Unlike all the previous fights in the Murder Grounds, Lex wanted to stream this one so that he could earn some MP off of it.

But the match would not be so quick. It would still take some time for the devil to overcome his tribulation, as best as he could tell.

He checked up on the rest of the Inn, and after ensuring everything was in order, decided to continue his journey. He had already noticed that Fenrir had not returned from the tower, but he was not concerned - well, he was not too concerned. He was confident Fenrir would be able to overcome whatever trial it faced, and once it did and exited the tower, Lex would be able to use his connection to summon the pup to himself.

Speaking of the tower, he had gotten a lead of what Destiny rank meant. As usual, he could check the emporium for it, but Lex did not bother with it for now. He'd get to it eventually. For now, his anxiety about running out of time was forcing him to rush to the Crystal realm as quickly as possible.

Taking out his 'ship' he once again continued on his journey, though this time he did not relax his vigilance at all.

Days passed, and Alexander once again asked for his help as the situation on his planet was getting extremely difficult. Unfortunately for him, Lex could not yet spare any time. In fact, Lex no longer even took the time to enjoy the scenery as he traversed the land because he was too focused on getting to his destination.

Once, he even had to resort to brute force and intimidation to avoid having his teleportation delayed. Two weeks later, he finally reached the lands bordering the Crystal nation. No race besides the Trellops were allowed to take control of the land near the Crystal race, and even they were allowed to do so with very stringent requirements.

They had to use their ability to terraform the land according to the esthetics of the Crystal race, which changed from time to time. Moreover, as strange as it felt, anyone wishing to enter the Crystal nation had to go through an immigration process within the territory controlled by the Trelops.

It was thus Lex found himself standing patiently in a long line of various races, many he had never even heard of, both humanoid as well as quadrupeds. He stood at the base of a hill, and the line extended well over the peak of it and beyond to the otherside, so he had no idea how long it would take. But for once, he had no choice but to be patient. No one dared be presumptuous bordering the territory of the Crystal race.

Fortunately, after asking around, Lex discovered that there was no need for a passport or anything along those lines. If there was, he didn't know what he would do.

As for what the immigration process actually entailed, no one knew exactly. They would be made to walk through a number of formations, the purpose of which was unknown. If, for any reason, one of the formations detected that there was something wrong with you, you would be marked.

Once marked, the security team which consisted of a race known as Earth Golems would escort you to a room where the Trelop incharge of the territory would interview you.

At no point in the entire process would anyone be harmed, at least according to the established precedent, though whether you would be allowed to enter or not was up to fate. No one knew exactly what would prevent one from being cleared for entry, which is why everyone was always tense.

Since they would be spending the next few hours together, Lex got comfortable and befriended the reptilian creatures next to him. As for what race they were, they themselves did not seem to know. Or at least, since they knew who they were, they did not feel like knowing what others called them mattered.

Apparently, they had been specifically selected to inhabit some territory within the Crystal nation. But despite their invitation, their destination remained a mystery to them. Who invited them or why were all questions that they did not consider asking. After all, most of the lesser races in this entire realm practically worshiped the Crystal race. Upon getting a chance to live in their empire, none would bother asking arbitrary questions.

Despite their... lack of... well, umm... Due to their limited intelligence, there was not a lot Lex could learn from them, so instead he began practicing his Innkeeper charm to keep the conversation going. The truth was, he needed to distract himself as best as he could during this long wait, because his increasing anxiety had suddenly vanished.

But the disappearance was not a good thing. From the sensation his instincts were giving him, it felt as if he had already run out of time for something.

Far away from the Crystal race, on the borders of the Hum nation, an army larger than ever appeared as if overnight. The land was blanketed in darkness as if the night sky was reflected on the ground, but the truth was nowhere near as beautiful or poetic. The black, poisonous slime covered the millions of Kraven that were crossing had covered the ground evenly, not allowing a single speck of earth to remain untainted.

The army broke through the border, and invaded the nation with an unyielding ferocity, the likes of which even the Kraven themselves had never shown. Moreover, it was not just the humans that were being targeted. Every nation other than the Crystal one was suddenly being invaded, all at once.

The feeble defense of the walls and formations crumbled under the tide of immortal Kraven, and soon after, so too did the towns and cities begin to fall. The unprecedented attack on all fronts began without any warning, and continued to crash forth as if it had no intention of stopping. It seemed the Kraven were determined to end this war, once and for all.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 679: Answers

An unstoppable tide was sweeping across the Crystal realm, targeting those lands owned by the nations as well as those farther, disconnected lands held by mere nobles or less powerful races. There was no forewarning for this attack, nor had there been such a massive invading force of Kraven ever before.

The number of immortals deployed was far beyond a number that any one nation could employ. Perhaps if multiple nations worked together, they could muster up the number of immortals required to fight off the force invading a single one of them. Yet, as things stood, there seemed to be little to no recourse.

The only remaining advantage they had was that the Crystal realm was so ridiculously vast, it would take even immortals a lot of time to traverse if they were not taking teleportation formations. Moreover, since the force was invading, they had to ensure they thoroughly swept each and every spot, so not only did they move slowly, they could not utilize teleportation formations.

A state of emergency was declared in every single nation, and mass evacuations were underway. Martial law, code black, and various other such names were thrown around in almost every conversation and the countries decided how much of their territory to give up while they prepared their own defenses.

Despite their clear disadvantage, it was not as if there was nothing they could do to retaliate. The Sol and Frio birds depended on the massive populations, just as much as the people living there required those birds. This was a secret well kept, but was now put to use in every battlefield.

Although enemies of this level would not do any harm to the Kraven, yet, the birds pulled out of the territories being invaded, plunging the land into darkness. Such was the case with all the territories controlled by the Kraven. Yet despite being inundated by endless monsters spawned from the darkness, they always seemed to have enough forces to spare for attacks.

For now, the trend seemed to be set. The Kraven were advancing forward, and none of those being invaded seemed capable enough to stop them. The process had just begun, so there was no indication yet of how the nations would retaliate once they got a hold of the situation, but many were already praying that the Crystal race would get involved. Well, at least the citizens were praying for such.

Meanwhile, at the border for the Crystal nation, Lex continued to wait in line. In stark contrast to much of the realm, he enjoyed the peaceful environment and continued to wait in line. In fact, he bought some of the local fruits from a peddler who continued to walk beside the line, hoping to attract the attention of those waiting. It was quite a pleasant experience.

Several hours later, when Lex was nearing his turn to proceed through the investigative formations, a worried Mary contacted him.

"Lex there's a situation I think you need to be updated on," she said, hesitant yet concerned. "We have some new Pro bono guests, which is quite normal. But the issue is the information they revealed. When they arrived, they were in quite a wounded state. Such situations are quite normal among Pro bono guests, so they were brought to the Recovery Pods. It's when they woke and began conversing amongst

themselves that I noticed something unusual. They seem to be mentioning a massive army of Kraven! They were overwhelmed and their city immediately fell under their siege."

"As unfortunate a thing as it is," Lex replied, "such things happen quite regularly here. The war with the Kraven hasn't stopped in hundreds of years."

"If that were all, it would not be worth notifying you. I thought the behavior of the survivors was unusual, and so sent Velma to investigate and interview them. As it turns out, the county they were in was four counties away from the battlefield. The Kraven should not have been able to just appear there overnight. Most importantly, while the survivors themselves were too weak to be sure, they claim that the number of immortals was way too high. Their city was not able to put up a defense at all."

Lex frowned. He did not have enough information about the situation to judge it accurately.

"Keep an eye on guests from the Crystal realm. See if you can learn any more information about the situation. What race are the guests from?"

"The guests are Sentinels. They don't feel too comfortable at the Inn considering the number of humans and humanoid beings, but they are too afraid to return home."

"I recall we made a spot at the Inn for all the spirits and encouraged them to go there. Recommend that area to the Sentinel race, they might be more comfortable there. In the meantime, keep investigating. If you learn anything relevant, don't hesitate to contact me"

For a moment, Lex wondered if the anxiety he had been feeling had anything to do with the aforementioned Kraven invasion, but concluded that he did not have information. Although the timing seemed to match, there was no saying for certain if the matters were related. After all, Lex's instincts would only come into play if he would be the one affected. How could he possibly be influenced by an invasion far off?

He turned his attention back to the line, as soon it would be his turn. Feeling as if he was walking through security at an airport, Lex eventually walked over the illuminated path through a number of formations. As he passed, he could feel himself being probed by various senses, though he was not sure exactly what the formations were looking for.

There seemed to be no problem, though, and at the end Lex was led to a private room by a massive Earth Golem.

Inside the room, surprisingly, sat a human in a security guard uniform, studying a document. Without looking up, the man asked, "Name and purpose of visit?"

"My name is Lex," he said, feeling a mix of amusement and disbelief. "My purpose here is to visit an elder of the Crystal race. He invited me to meet him upon completion of a task he gave."

"Do you have anything that can corroborate your claim of an invitation? Or do you know the name and address of the elder you are referring to? We can ascertain the veracity of your claims ourselves as well."

"I have this," said Lex, as he handed over the letter given to him by the Crystal race elder so long ago. It was sealed, and Lex had not tried to open it, yet he had read the name and address on the letter. It bore the elder's name, alongside some numbers the purpose of which Lex could not yet identify, as well as the name of the place the elder asked Lex to meet him: Valesco.

The guard read the elders name, which was Ezio, and showed no reaction, but when he read the name Valesco he was startled and sat up straight. He gave Lex a bewildered look, before turning his attention back to the letter. Despite his station, he did not dare open it himself.

"Please wait here a moment," the guard said, and scurried out the door, letter still in hand. Lex expected somewhat of a reaction, since he had learnt that Valesco was a prison. Yet this was too much, right?

A short while later, a small cat made of tree roots walked in, followed closely by the guard, and jumped up onto the table. This was the smallest Trelop Lex had ever seen, but the aura he radiated was one of the strongest. It reminded him of Auntie Jeena, one of the first Trelops he had ever met. To date, Lex felt like she was the strongest Trelop he had ever encountered. This tiny cat was a close second.

"Dear guest, do not be alarmed. Your admission into the Crystal nation is all but assured. We just need to ask a few mandatory questions for our own record keeping purposes. Can you share with me when you received this invitation?"

"I can't remember exactly how long it's been, but it's already been many months," Lex said. To be honest, since he left Earth, he had stopped paying attention to the calendar. He didn't even know what month it was. Maybe he should create his own calendar once he has his own realm, so that he can keep better track of time.

"Can you share the location you were at when you received the invitation?"

"Inside a Minor realm."

"Were there any... significant events that took place, during your visit to that particular Minor realm?"

"A couple I suppose. For one, we discovered a sleeping chamber of the Crystal race. I don't know what happened to it, but we reported it to our seniors at the time. The second was a run in with a Kraven. To this day no one knows why a single Kraven was able to infiltrate that realm, and why it did so alone."

The more answers Lex gave, the more grave the cat looked, until Lex eventually realized something was wrong.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 680: Lord Belmont

Since the immigration process seemed to be quite thorough, it made sense that Lex would be questioned in detail about his purpose. Considering that he learnt that the invitation he had was from a supposed prison, he had already prepared himself to face some difficulty. But the issue was, Lex wasn't really facing any problems at all. In fact, even during the questioning process everyone was quite civil.

The problem was, the more questions that Lex answered, the more his questioners looked grave. It was as if their roles were reversed and Lex was grilling them instead of the other way around.

"Is... is everything alright?" Lex asked, when he realized there was a pause in the questions, as the Trelop seemed to be digesting his answer.

"Yes. You have been cleared for entry, but there are some follow up procedures you have to take part in. Come with me."

The cat jumped off the table and led Lex out of the room and away from the immigration area. Once outside the building, the cat seemed to grow with each step as more roots emerged from the ground and joined with its body, until eventually the cat's body became as large as a horse.

"Climb aboard, it'll be quicker that way," said the Trelop, with no regard for the dignity of an immortal. Lex felt slightly awkward, but lacking any real reverence towards immortals, he did not hesitate and soon found himself nestled atop the wooden cat.

"Hang on tight," it said, before it suddenly leaped forward, nearly jerking Lex off its back. Fortunately, Lex had quick reflexes and tightened his grip on the cat's body with his legs. A part of him wanted to ask the cat if it could use the roots that made its body to form stirrups or a seatbelt, but then thought better of it.

"I am taking you to one of the gates to the Crystal nation," the Trelop told him. "From there, you will be escorted to Valesco. I will share some of the Crystal race customs with you, so you do not remain ignorant of what is happening around you.

"First of all, and most importantly, inside the Crystal nation, you will have the status of a guest. That will afford you some perks, but it will also restrict you. For example, you will not be judged for any crimes you've committed outside the Crystal nation, so long as it wasn't against a member of the Crystal race. However, your rights within the nation are severely restricted. Without a member of the Crystal race sponsoring you, you cannot get a job, own or rent property, attend a school, enter museums, enter certain areas in their cities, hunt, or approach private property. Those are just some of the restrictions on you.

"But you do not have to worry about that, as you have a sponsor, which will be Ezio. Another thing, if you accidentally commit a crime while following the orders of your sponsor, you will not be held liable. Instead, it is the sponsor who will have to answer for your actions.

"Thirdly, if a priest or pastor of any of the temples requests your presence... you do not have the right to reject. I highly recommend you stay as far away from them as possible, as attracting their attention will not usually end well for you.

"Fourthly, if a member of the Crystal race takes interest in you, in any capacity, you have the right to refuse, or strike up a bargain.

"Fifthly, and most importantly in your case, if you become a witness in an ongoing legal dispute among members of the Crystal race, you will be forced to remain as long as the dispute trial goes on. In this, you will have no say."

"Why is the last one most important for me?" Lex asked gravely, a guess forming in his mind. It couldn't be, right?

The cat turned its head to look at Lex, hesitation in its eyes. It seemed to be debating something in its mind, but eventually decided not to answer.

"You'll know soon enough."

Faster than Lex anticipated, they arrived at the border to the Crystal nation, which had literal walls extending both ways, with a magnificent 100 feet (30 meters) gate in the middle. Though the walls were only slightly shorter than the gate itself, something told Lex that flying above them would prove easier said than done.

A number of guards stood at the gate, wearing armor and holding up long spears. Though it was hard to tell, since every inch of their body was covered by the armor, not even revealing their eyes, Lex believed these guards were of the Crystal race. From what he recalled, the Crystal race was a very conservative race who did not like showing their crystal to anyone.

If they revealed their crystal to you, it was a sign of great trust and intimacy. Usually. There were, of course, many members of their race who lived quite liberally and showed off their crystals bare in the wind, like precious stones.

The guards, who stood there like statues as a number of various races passed them by, seemed to gain a semblance of life as they noticed the Trelop appearing, an unknown human astride it.

"Ahoy Silvia," said one of the guards, clearly familiar with the Trelop. "How fares thy against the hoard of migrants? Tis the season of new blood, and so new blood comes roaring through to the Kingdom of Crystal."

"You're not a poet, Fran. Don't try to be eloquent," the cat replied, the dismissal ready on her lips. It seemed like the two were old friends.

The other guard only chuckled, but the exchange ended there and the cat swiftly skipped the queue and took Lex through the gates.

His senses tingled as he passed through, a consequence of his affinity for space he guessed, the world beyond the gate seemed entirely different. This is what his guests probably experienced, Lex thought as the pure and somehow 'cleaner' spiritual energy swirled around him, washing away the 'pollution' that was the impure energy from outside the gate.

Though Silvia, the Trelop, did not pause for she was long accustomed to this sensation, Lex stopped paying attention to his surroundings as he studied how the energy washed his body. It was curious, as he felt that even the faintest aura of energy from outside was purged, as if it wasn't energy but a plague.

Although Lex had long noticed how there is a difference in how energy behaves depending on purity, this was a phenomenon that he experienced for the first time. It was only the energy that he had stored within his body, long influenced by his affinities, that remained unaffected by the purge.

He wondered what star ranking this energy density would fall under, for it definitely wasn't the same as the rest of the realm. But Lex did not have the opportunity to wonder for long, as Silvia's voice woke him from his stupor.

"Lord Belmont, I have a case that I think you should handle personally."

Lex looked up to see a rather slender member of the Crystal race, his face entirely revealed to the world though the rest of his body was covered by a slim, fitted suit. The crystal that made up his face carried in it a faint hue of green, giving this Lord Belmont an aura of vibrancy and vitality. Just by looking at him, Lex felt his mood affected, seemingly calmed down and filled with admiration.

The sensation lasted only for a mere moment before Lex gathered himself, and detached his mind from his feelings by entering a state of flow. Although the man was not an enemy, Lex had never experienced such an influence on his mood, even when facing immortals.

Little did he know, that was because the system protected him from such things within the Inn. At the same time, while wearing the Host Attire, he himself affected others in a similar fashion. It was a natural trait of those who had exceptional mastery of certain laws.

Though Lex did not allow a single change to appear on his face as he entered the state of flow, Lord Belmont seemed to notice that Lex had extricated himself from the influence of his natural aura.

Laughing, he said, "please excuse me if you find my aura disturbing. I mean no harm by it. It is just a natural part of my being."

Lex only nodded without saying anything, as he was waiting for an explanation. It was clearly obvious now that there was something wrong with the elder who invited him. He just hoped it wouldn't present a hurdle in his own mission.

Smiling, Lord Belmont received the invitation that Silvia was handing him - the very one that Lex had presented as proof of invitation.

When he saw the names on it, Lord Belmont's pleasant expression changed to surprise.

"When did you get this?" he asked, unable to control himself.