

Innkeeper 701

The Innkeeper

Chapter 701: Arriving guests

The small town of Babylon was in a remote, nearly forgotten corner of the Crystal realm. For so long, it saw no more excitement than a reputable trader passing through because their normal route was blocked by monsters. Once, the children of the noble family which owned the territory passed through the town, and it was considered the greatest news.

Children gathered in the streets and parents took off from work just to see their carriage pass them by. There was a vast class difference between them, sure, but there was also a difference of cultivation. In the world where strength was the most important thing, there was no greater celebrity than those that wielded great strength, and at that time it was surely the children of nobles.

But since then, as if cursed by the bad luck of a protagonist who happened to be passing by, the town saw one major event after another. A maniacal serial killer terrorized the city. The Sol birds flew away, and left them in darkness. Monsters spawned all around them, trapping them within, still with the serial killer. Then the formations protecting them failed, inviting death and destruction.

Not many managed to survive, but of them the few that did were then further flabbergasted when an immortal monster attacked the town nearly decimating all life.

Yes, the citizens of Babylon had suffered through more than most adventurers who ventured out into the world seeking fortune and fame.

Then, finally, there was a period of peace. The few who survived had never been more thankful for a mundane Monday than after those horrid few weeks. Yet now, as if to balance all the pain they suffered, the citizens of Babylon were witnessing the most spectacular event anyone from their ancestry had witnessed for the past 100 generations.

A marriage between two immortal lineages was taking place within their town. Normally that would have nothing to do with them besides give them a few stories to share with their kids. But for whatever reason, the families had decided to make this wedding extremely grand. As if that alone was not enough, the mysterious and powerful, yet remarkably friendly owner of the Midnight Tavern decided their scale was not enough and added a few touches of their own.

There were rumors that the groom, Pvarti Noel, was good friends with the tavern owner, and he wanted to make his friend's day special. As a result, the citizens did not know whose generosity they were exactly benefiting from, but they did not care much.

Mario Ricci, also known as the Goatfather, walked the streets of Babylon followed by his gang members, throwing out cultivation pills as if they were flower petals. His son, Elio Ricci, had opened a free dojo where martial combat lessons were being given to any and all who were interested, once again, free of charge.

Thousands of cultivation chambers had been opened up and made available to the public, with nary a mention of price or payment. The only condition on the chambers was that no one could hog the room for too long, as it was meant to be shared by everyone.

Standard cultivation techniques were being sent to every home in the town, alongside a book of notes of things to look out for while cultivating, some medicine to help getting started and one pure spirit stone. Compared to the techniques that normal citizens had access to generally, these techniques were more complete and had fewer drawbacks.

Hundreds of traditional as well as orthodox doctors and medical practitioners showed up and began giving out free treatments. Each public building and facility in the town got a free and extensive upgrade. Famous and renowned chefs from around the region were hired and they cooked feasts for the whole town in the public parks, for all to share.

The week of the wedding was like one continuous party, and where there was a party, there had to be drinks. For the week, Midnight tavern sent out drinks across the town for anyone and everyone. Each drink not only delivered an experience of euphoria down to the very soul, it never had any adverse consequences such as hangovers or sickness. In fact, many people had sudden breakthroughs while drinking!

Of course everyone had varying temperaments, and not everyone wanted to party. Some were more dedicated, and were pursuing some ambitions or goals and could not tolerate wasting time eating or drinking. Those people were offered jobs for before and after the wedding at extremely lucrative rates alongside unbelievable benefits. Each and every person who worked for the wedding did so with unmatched enthusiasm and vigor.

With so many workers, the entertainment would, of course, not be limited to just that. Across the city seemingly random people burst into spontaneous dance and song with extensive backdrops and backup performers. The suddenness and unexpectedness of the songs, as well as their catchy tunes hooked the hearts of everyone who heard them.

The extremely well choreographed dances started an all new trend of dancing, and Babylon was quickly developing a culture of dance and song that would last long after the wedding was actually over. Of course, Lex, for some reason, did not find the dances so extraordinary. But then again, he had seen the original Indian films they were inspired by so maybe that's why he could not share in the feeling of the citizens.

But while such entertainment was sufficient for the masses, the wedding guests from abroad could not exactly appreciate them the same way. For them, of course, there were other forms of entertainment arranged.

Fighting was, as usual, one of the most popular activities and strong warriors from far and wide had been summoned to hold their duels in an arena that was constructed right in front of the tavern. The best seats were on the tavern rooftop.

The fights were definitely not choreographed, and the fighters held nothing back so they were often brutal and bloody, much to the appreciation of the viewers.

Besides fighting there were multiple sophisticated performances arranged to match the taste of the powerful elite.

Attracted by all the hubbub, some of the most illustrious traders and merchants had come to the town and set up stalls and began holding auctions of unusual yet powerful artifacts. In fact, even Lex set up a stall and sold items he got from others at the Midnight Inn. He was investing heavily in this wedding, so recouping some of his costs was perfectly normal.

Amidst all this hustle and bustle, the actual two families involved in the wedding were actually the most nervous. This still could not believe Lex's claims, although they had seen the invitation for themselves.

That is, until Cornelius II arrived at Babylon three days before the wedding. His arrival was very discreet and none of his usual entourage followed him. Only a couple of his advisors followed him, and they too remained in disguise.

The King made contact with both the Phillip and Noel families, to let them know of his arrival, before disappearing himself without giving them any information on his plans. They were only informed to follow along and give blind support to any and all of his actions the next few days.

Somehow, learning of the King's presence as well as his arrival made the two families even more nervous. While everyone else in the town partied, whether to take advantage of all the free stuff or to forget their roles in the ongoing dreadful war, the Noels and Phillips found themselves unable to do so. While everyone felt time was going too fast, for them time seemed to drag on forever.

In this excited yet lethargic manner, another day passed. Like the King before him, this time the incumbent ruler of the Varns arrived, but disappeared soon after announcing his arrival to the two families.

No one had any idea where they were hiding, or if they had already met. Even Lex, who was kept up to date by the families, could only guess at their plans. Fortunately Lex was able to control his nerves, and so did not become nervous. Such a thing would easily be detected now that he did not have the protection of the Host Attire in the Crystal realm.

The same day, a seemingly ordinary butterfly arrived at Babylon. Although she looked very different from most Trellops, who had large bodies taking on the shapes of animals using some feature of their territory, the butterfly was the serving ruler of the Trellops. Amongst their race, such a title did not really hold too much value, except to say that she was the strongest of their race,

The next day, one day before the wedding, the Poloids and Sentinels also arrived, all of them being discreet and hiding their identities.

Everything was almost ready. Tomorrow would be the day. He only hoped this would be enough to get a SSS+ quest ranking.

After tapping on his desk for a few minutes, Lex decided that it was not enough. He could take no chance. He had to get the highest ranking he could, so he would find a way to improve the score even more.

From the Midnight Inn, Lex teleported away and appeared in front of the Infinity Emporium.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 702: Gifts

What Lex had in mind was a little expensive, but that was alright. He could earn money again in the future, but if there was an issue with his cultivation then that was not really something he could easily overcome.

Moreover, once he was done with the wedding, he was intending on focusing on retrieving that special treasure on the rogue planet that the mysterious person had told him about in the Suera Galaxy. Treasure hunting was bound to be a profitable endeavor, right? With his many advantages, he did not expect so much trouble.

He walked into the emporium and was welcomed by the familiar presence of Powell. He seriously hoped that his guests found the Inn as helpful as he found the emporium, because it had helped him out of quite a few troubles.

"Ah, Lex, it's good to see you," Powell said enthusiastically. Oddly enough, he was not completely in his traditional uniform for the emporium. Instead, he was wearing a cardigan and had a pipe sticking out of his mouth, the smell of tobacco strong on him.

"It's good to see you too," Lex responded fondly. "I see life has been good for you recently. You've picked up a new hobby."

"Oh this?" he asked, pulling out the pipe and raising it proudly. "I recently got my hands on grade four Cookies and Cream flavored tobacco from Dunya. It's absolutely phenomenal, I highly recommend it. As for me, life is naturally very good. It has been that way for a while now, all thanks to you of course."

"Haha, I'm glad my spendthrift ways have benefited you. In that case, today should be a good day for you as well. I need a recommendation from you. I'm about to attend a wedding, but I don't have a gift

yet. A lot of Earth Immortals will be there, but I want my gift to completely outclass anything they give, and make them envious to boot. But I'm not so good at gift giving. Any suggestions?"

"Suggestions? I have more than just a few," Powell said, suddenly sitting up straight. How convenient it was that his passion was to help his customers. It made him a good employee.

"Before I give you suggestions though, let me ask you a few questions. What is the race of the guest? And cultivation? If its a race with genders, then what's the gender? Does the recipient have a profession? Is this their first wedding? Do they have the ability to procreate, and if so, do they already have any kids? What kind of life expectancy are we looking at? Are there any food allergies that I should know about? What are the recipients' top three hobbies? During the wedding, is the recipient expected to complete any feats of great courage or honor? Does the recipient have an aversion to edible underwear? Does the..."

The questions Powell had were plentiful and quite thorough. Lex was not able to answer many questions, for example any that were pertaining to undergarments, but he at least knew that he did not intend on giving any kind gift of that nature!

It was at the end that he asked possibly the most important question of all: the budget! Placing a hand on his heart, Lex decided to go all out, as far as willing to trade even the teacup containing the law of femininity! Upon hearing this, even Powell was startled. This was no ordinary wedding present. The high cost Lex was willing to pay suddenly disqualified all the options Powell was considering.

At this price range, there were actually very few items they had at all worthy of exchange. But just because they were expensive did not mean they would make great wedding gifts, as a gift had to be suitable.

Wearing a serious expression Powell said, "Please allow me a moment to compile a list for you of suitable presents. Do you have a time restriction on delivery?"

"Yes, unfortunately I do not have long before the wedding begins. It will begin in approximately twenty hours."

"Another tough condition," Powell lamented before he diverted his attention to his tablet. Using his special access he had been given to be able to cater to Lex, he began looking through all their most precious items to see what was suitable.

Just as he started, his eyes fell onto a specific item the description of which startled him! Unable to restrain himself, he immediately showed the item to Lex whose eyes began to gleam.

"Yes, this will do quite nicely!"

There was no dawn or dusk in the Crystal realm, and the hues of the sky all depended on the mood of the Sol birds. Yet as the day of the wedding dawned, the sky was painted with a brilliant orange and gold in the far horizon, as if a magnificent sun were rising!

Such an auspicious sight mesmerized even Lex, who was previously wishing his domain extended to the skies as well so that he may create a wonderful display. Yet, through some fortunate encounter, it happened on its own.

Lex quickly learned of the reasons: this was a rare occasion where a new flock of Sol birds was entering the territory of the ones who currently inhabited these lands. Moreover, the incoming flock was clearly more mature which could be seen by the brilliant display.

Lex, the Noel family, the Phillip family and all the others who had gathered for any reason at all considered this a sign of tremendously good luck, for anything associated with light in the Crystal realm was given great significance. After all, where there was light, there was life, and where there was darkness, there were monsters!

Taking one last glance at the sky, Lex crossed his fingers before returning to the matters at hand. While he himself had to focus on the impending meeting, he also had to ensure the wedding procedures would go along smoothly. To ensure everything would be perfect, he had one last meeting with Ash, the wedding expert he had sent here from the Midnight Inn.

As this was a union of two immortal families, especially two families subordinated to the royal family, there was a long sequence of traditional ceremonies that needed to be fulfilled.

The two families, and the bride and groom especially would be heavily involved at each step, though each family would have separate ceremonies.

Then a procession would begin where both families departed from separate locations, but met together at the final destination at the same time, which in this case would be the tavern. Then, a few more ceremonies would follow after which the two would officially be considered wed.

On this day, there would be no dancing or fighting or plays or fabulous displays until the wedding was concluded, and the town would adorn a solemn feel. Only after the two were wed would the celebrations begin!

During all this time, however, Lex would be busy with the meeting, which would start very soon.

"Rick, has Edward arrived?" he asked, referring to the representative of the monsters.

"Yes," Rick responded seriously. "To avoid any unnecessary troubles, he is staying deep within the sea for now. I will have to send the catfish to get him."

"Well send the fish. It's almost time."

According to what he had informed the two families, the meeting will begin the same time as the ceremonies which will be taking place in their respective residences. Every time one of the royal family members appeared, the same information was shared with them.

Edward was the first to arrive, since he was the only one who had directly contacted the Inn. He appeared in the same human form he took so long ago when he immersed himself in human civilization to increase his exposure and learn more about the realm.

He was extremely fair, to the point that he almost appeared pale, though that did not detract from his handsome appearance. He had crystal clear, bright blue eyes that mesmerized Naki, Nami and Nani when they saw him, and a gentle smile on his lips that made him seem mischievous.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance," Edward said politely when he finally met Lex, giving a soft bow instead of shaking hands.

"The pleasure is mine," Lex reciprocated. "I'm glad that you could make it. I'm sure your presence will add greatly to the meeting that we are about to have."

"I hope so, though I admit my being here might invite some trouble for you. The other races don't take fondly to monsters, though I do not blame them."

"The matter we are here to discuss is greater than individual interests. When they learn of the magnitude of what we face, they will be forced to set aside their personal grudges and work together."

"I sincerely hope that you are right," said a third voice, as a newcomer entered the room. Lex had, of course, already sensed his arrival inside the tavern.

"Cornelius," Lex acknowledged with a simple nod.

"Lex," the king of the Hum nation similarly simply nodded. "I have been looking forward to meeting you."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 703: Alive?

Lex knew all about the reason the King was looking for him, as he had had a conversation at length with Aegis about it. The King wanted his cultivation technique since it was one for the True Path. Unfortunately, it was not one that could be shared even if Lex really wanted to share it, which he did not.

"I've also been looking forward to meeting with you. I've heard much about you, and I am good friends with your daughter Cwenhild."

"And to think, once there were rumors in the academy that you're one of my children too. I found the events leading up to that quite amusing."

Lex smiled wryly. Now that those events were long past, he could really look back and find them amusing. At the time, though, it was more nerve wracking.

"I found it quite an honor that anyone would think to link me to you. But at the same time, one cannot put too much stock in rumors. Maybe one day, when I grow stronger, the story peddlers will claim I am secretly your brother."

This one statement, while complimenting Cornelius, also displayed the deeply rooted confidence that Lex held in himself and his future. Though not directly, he was already claiming that rising to the same height as the King was a foregone conclusion.

Cornelius smiled, as if he did not pay attention to the claim, and said, "the boldness of youth always enables one to achieve outstanding results. Even I achieved most of my most famous achievements when I was young and loud. You are already not less than I, for when last has history seen the representatives of so many of the races gather together for a meeting?"

Cornelius' words seem to be comparing Lex's claims to the brashness of youth, reminding him that until something is already achieved it is naught but loud boasting. At the same time, he was pretending to give Lex a compliment, but was laying the credit of his achievement to the mysterious author of the book... -no, eh, he was laying the credit of his achievement to the mysterious author of the letter that invited them all here. Lex smiled, for little did Cornelius know that he was indeed the one who authored the invitation letters, so his confidence was not assaulted as Cornelius had been hoping.

"Come, let us move towards the meeting room while we wait for the others to arrive," Lex said, completely uninterested in entering a duel of words with Cornelius.

Seeing that he had failed to entrap Lex with his words, Cornelius turned his attention to Edward, the monster. His own confidence, too, was unaffected and he had many other ploys waiting to be revealed.

It was not easily that he had brought humans, the race that was born the weakest, and made them strong. Besides the Crystal race which stood out firmly as the strongest, there was no clear ranking of

which race was stronger or weaker than the other. As a result, while the humans did not gain a clear advantage over others, at least none could hold influence over them either. Even the seemingly mighty Trellops made deals with humans instead of forcefully taking territory.

Other than his own clear genius in handling difficult situations appropriately, it was also because of Cornelius' strength, which was widely recognized. He was far stronger than an Earth Immortal was supposed to be, and following the True Path was not enough to make up for the difference. If it were, Aegis would not be so outclassed by his own father. At the same time, Edward would not be so well behaved in front of Cornelius. The monster had been alive for millions of years, but clearly he still suffered a trauma from when he and Cornelius last fought.

Lex led the two to one of the many hidden rooms of the tavern, as they had to remain out of sight while the ceremonies took place within the tavern.

Sipping on one of the incredible beverages Lex had prepared for Earth Immortals from the emporium before the meeting began, Cornelius looked at Lex and said, "while we wait for the rest, why don't you share a little about the reason we were invited."

"I think it's best if we wait for full attendance," Lex said politely, yet uninfluenced by Cornelius. "After all, otherwise I'd have to endlessly repeat myself if I had to tell each guest separately."

Also, by having everyone in the same room, he could study their actions and reactions and thereby guess how many secrets each of them was hiding. As if on cue, a small butterfly entered the tavern, sitting gently above the head of a large turtle.

The ruler of the Trellops had a unique aura, as if despite the small size she retained her full strength that she wielded within her territory. It was as if wherever she went automatically became her territory.

In comparison, the ruler of the Varns was less impressive. Maybe it was because he was used to seeing the Galactic Sovereign Turtle, but seeing that the Varn leader had the form of a turtle, much of his aura was subdued. Not to mention, he was being ridden atop his head by the butterfly, yet he dared not complain.

"Welcome to the tavern, honored guests. I am glad that you could make it," Lex said, as he met them at the entrance, and brought them towards the meeting room.

"It is not often when one receives an invitation radiating so much power. It is a habit of mine to make powerful friends," spoke the butterfly, though his voice did not travel through the air. Instead, it appeared in Lex's mind, powerful and loud.

Lex sensed something the moment fluctuate in the Soul plane when Elena spoke. It seemed she was using that as a medium to speak, rather than the physical plane.

The turtle, instead, only grunted. It seemed like he was not too ecstatic about being used as a mount by the butterfly.

"Sabr, it is good to see you again," Cornelius said, looking at the turtle with great familiarity.

"Cornelius," Sabr only replied with a base acknowledgement, his voice deep and reverberating.

"Your majesty Elena, it is an honor to finally meet you," Cornelius said, his voice a lot more humble, towards the butterfly.

"My daughters speak fondly of you Cornelius. You are a friend of nature, and of the Trelops," the butterfly replied.

"It is a pleasure to meet you all," Edward said, trying to be polite. Yet it seemed none of the rulers were not in the mood to socialize with a monster, and only responded with barely noticeable nods, or even simply glared.

"While we wait for the others," said Cornelius, his voice casual, as if he were speaking randomly, "would anyone mind if we discuss the Kraven? How strongly have they been attacking your borders? What's the situation there? For the humans, I can say that in the past week we have already lost as much land as the past dozen years. There are no formations or weapons that can be used to deter such a massive force of immortals."

The mood in the room instantly turned foul, as everyone seemed to have been suffering at the Kraven's hands.

"What I want to know is where so many immortals came from!" Sabr growled, his angry aura pressing down on everyone, though it seemed a subconscious display. As the only non-immortal in the room, Lex was the most susceptible to it, but he had already planned for such a thing. He was forming a 'room' around himself at all times, effectively putting himself inside a different space from the rest, only leaving a small gap which would allow communication.

That small gap still resulted in the immortals' aura leaking through, but equipped with his defensive suit, not to mention his own resilient body, Lex was able to tolerate it without showing any external discomfort.

"Even an immortal cannot fight against the might of nature. Yet when thousands of them are gathered on one battlefield, they surely can. The only way to fight them is to allow them to gain more land, and have them spread thinly so their force is diluted," remarked Elena, though her voice remained regal and devoid of stress.

"Why not use this opportunity to request intervention from the Crystal race? With such a massive threat on their borders, surely now they have to intervene," said Sabr impatiently.

Immediately though, Lex noticed something strange. Neither Cornelius nor Elena reacted too strongly to the suggestion, as if they already knew it was bound to fail.

"Unfortunately I have some bad news," Lex said at that point, lest the silence pervade too long. "I visited the Crystal nation personally, and even shared some of the details of what we will discuss today with them. Yet instead of worrying about the issue, they attempted to assassinate me. I am afraid they might be complicit in the scheme afoot."

Suddenly, all heads turned towards Lex in shock. The Crystals tried to assassinate him... and he's still alive?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 704: Secret Conversations

Extending their spirit sense to examine a peer could be considered rude, and some might even take great offense to it. But in the Earth Immortal realm why would they need to purposefully extend their senses? At this range, just their eyesight could gather more information than just sight. When they

focused on Lex, mostly out of instinct due to the shocking news they heard, they immediately noticed that he was merely a projection. His real body was not around!

This once again startled them! How was it possible to have such a perfect projection without any trace of the link to the real body? If they had not focused they would not have noticed at all.

Before they could resolve their confusion though a tingle in the back of their necks, a sensation soft and barely perceptible, grabbed their attention. It was a sign of a warning. Their bodies were reacting defensively to something extremely, extremely dangerous!

While Lex was still smiling as ever, the warmth on his person changed to frigid coldness for barely a second. Still, the second passed and Lex returned to his usual self, while the sensation of impending danger passed. But now everyone was acting warily. Clearly, that had been a soft warning from Lex.

None here had any intention of acting rudely, since none of them could compete with the power radiating from the letter. Yet all of them were extremely confident, and had something to rely on should they get into trouble. Their deep heritage and secret weapons were the source of their confidence, but they were quickly reminded that they weren't the only ones with secrets.

Lex was quite pleased with the reaction the immortals showed. It was very important he retained control of the situation, which was harder to do in a room full of not only immortal beings, but leaders among their respective races. To stimulate the sense of danger, he had momentarily powered on his Dragon's wake formation.

The powerful and threatening aura it radiated was far above the limits of this world, so it was usually a strong deterrent. This time, Lex did not turn it on all the way, as he did not know how they would react if they realized the power was above their worlds limit, for if anyone had the potential to notice this detail it was one of those here. But just stimulating the formation was enough to pass a subtle warning.

"Yes, like I said, they attempted to assassinate me the moment I shared the news with them. As a result, I did not even get to share the invitation with them. It's hard to keep secrets when the invitations were sent to so many, but unless someone specifically shared the news with them, it is likely they do not even know about this meeting."

Silence pervaded the room as everyone contemplated what this meant, not only for this meeting but the general situation of their realm.

It was while they were contemplating that the final two expected guests arrived at the Inn. The Sentinel was humanoid and was wearing something that looked like a knight's armor, but instead of metal it was made of a bone like material. Beside him was a short yet fat insect like creature that looked like a large, chubby grasshopper. That would be the Poliod.

Lex teleported to them, and after extending his greeting, led them to the meeting room.

As he had done before, Cornelius was the first to welcome the newcomers.

"Abraxas, I see you haven't croaked yet," Cornelius said, looking at the Sentinel wearing a look of schadenfreude.

"Your fist is not as strong as you assume. You'll have to try harder if you wish to kill me," the Sentinel replied, once again speaking directly in the mind. The Sentinels were a unique spirit based species, meaning that while they were mostly spirit creatures, they also possessed physical bodies which is what made them unique in that category.

Unfortunately, their bodies happened to be their greatest weakness. But despite such a glaring weakness, they could not be considered a weak race for they were far superior in terms of spirit control and manipulation than humans could ever be.

"Kritter, I have long looked forward to meeting you," Cornelius said looking at the Poliod, not bothering to reply to Abraxas.

Kritter waved its antennae and its thoughts were transmitted to those around it.

"Cornelius, you bastard! I know full well that you grilled one of our Duke's to try as a delicacy!"

Everyone in the room looked at Cornelius with a strange expression, while only Edward looked at him with some admiration.

As completely unperturbed by the accusation, he responded, "Come now Kritter, it's not like Poloids haven't attacked humans before. Not to mention everyone knows what happens when Poloids take back their victims bodies to the hive. Don't be the kettle that calls the pot black."

Kritter's body trembled with rage, but he did not escalate the situation. It did, however, have to vent its anger somewhere, and the Kraven became his victims.

"Who the hell can tell me what's going on with the new Kraven invasion? They've yet to reach our new borders, but if we don't stop them now the whole realm will be their playground! This game has gone on long enough! We need to join hands together lest one of you soon repeat the history of the Poloids!"

There was aggressiveness and anger in Kritter's message, but Lex also suddenly realized something. His words... seemed to be referring to certain shared secrets. He instantly entered a state of flow and noticed peculiarities in the speech of the various leaders. At face value they meant one thing, but a deeper analysis would reveal hidden meanings.

"...for when last has history seen the representatives of so many of the races gather together for a meeting..." Cornelius had said while praising him, but the statement also left room for another interpretation. A meeting such as this, where the leaders of the various races were brought together might have occurred before as well. Who had the power to summon all the races save the Crystal race, but they seemed too uninterested in foreign affairs to do so.

"...it is not often when one receives an invitation radiating so much power. It is a habit of mine to make powerful friends..." was said by Elena when she arrived, but her words also insinuated that this was not the first time she had witnessed such a powerful aura! But the aura of the Innkeeper was deep and powerful, and only Dao Lords dared claim its equal, yet no Dao Lords could exist in this realm! Where had she felt such an aura before?

But wait...

"...what I want to know is where so many immortals came from..." Sabr had asked when talking of the Kraven, yet Lex recalled that no one explicitly answered his question, or even referred to it again. Instead, Elena had directly led the conversation into the Trelops ongoing fight with them. Later, when Sabr asked about requesting the Crystals intervention, Cornelius and Elena did not take it seriously, nor did they bother explaining why such an action was destined to fail.

So many hints yet Lex had overlooked them all. It was only when Kritter finally arrived and blatantly called the war with the Kraven a game that Lex finally noticed the strange environment. It was as if there were two different conversations going on in this room. One was on the surface, and the words were taken literally as they were said. The second conversation seemed to be hidden behind clever phrases and specific wording, and between those who were already in the know about certain matters.

No wait, perhaps there were even more than two secret conversations going on, but Lex had not picked up on them yet. As far as he could tell, Sabr was left out and did not know the secret. There was also a possibility that Abras did not know either, though he had not said much yet so it was hard to judge his position.

Lex quickly recalled all his political and history related lessons back at the academy and to see what he knew about Sabr. Since the Varn were allies of the humans and shared a large border, knowledge about them was pretty prevalent and they had learned about them in great detail.

Right, he recalled in one of his lessons that the latest Varn monarch, Sabr, had only come into power around 100 years ago, and inherited the position from his uncle who was badly wounded in a battle with the Kraven. The old King had since then been in retreat to heal from his injuries.

Lex's eyes gleamed as he stood in silence and allowed the conversation to continue moving forward. The more these realm leaders spoke, the more secrets Lex would be able to uncover.

"Even if we ally together, which battlefield would we tackle first? Whose lands would first receive reinforcements while whose lands would be left unprotected? Joining hands together is unrealistic. Or at least it would have been, but we have a new player on the table now."

Abras, who had just spoken, turned and looked at Edward. Before this, Monsters had only ever been viewed as the enemy of all life. Could that possibly change?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 705: True Deity

Under the influence of his vigorous cultivation, as well as many techniques that he learnt specifically for this day to keep him in top shape, Pvarti looked fresh and seemed energetic as he went through one ceremony after another. For some ceremonies he was required to act, for example pledging his

allegiance to the royal family, while for others he had to sit in the middle of a crowd while they used him as a prop. The situation was... less than ideal, but fortunately he would only have to go through this awkward procedure only once - hopefully, since if he had to go through it again it meant he was once again getting married.

Despite his appearance, however, the man was actually feeling quite nervous and uneasy. Although he was making the best decision for his future, and if all went well with the war, the resources at his disposal would be tremendous. His ascent to greatness would become but a matter of time. Yet he could not really claim to be... completely enamored by his intended. Her personality was slightly extreme, and even now he could not forget how she had used him so blatantly all in the efforts to test out his loyalty.

But... there wasn't much he could do about that anymore. He would have to learn how to get along with her. Hopefully things would work out for the best. For a moment he became weak in the knees, but there were too many techniques and medicine keeping him in top shape so he recovered instantly.

For some unknown and completely unrelated reason, Pvarti made a resolution to surpass the Earth Immortal realm and ascend from the Crystal realm as quickly as possible. He wasn't losing out if he didn't make it, but he had to at least try.

"Don't worry bro, just another hour of this before you get to see your lovely bride," teased his sister. How could she not know his thoughts? Would she really be his sister if she didn't tease him about exactly what scared him?

"As a special surprise gift for you, I've already made arrangements for you two to attend a special honeymoon vacation with a group of five other newly married couples. Love Island is highly recommended by all my friends."

Despite all eyes being on him, Pvarti couldn't help but groan. The day had started so beautifully with an amazing sight of a new flock on the horizon. But just as the flock disappeared and took the beautiful hues in painted in the sky with them, so too was Pvarti's confidence disappearing.

Edward, who was sipping on a warm malt, paused and smiled as all eyes turned on him. As uncomfortable as he felt under Cornelius' scrutinizing gaze, it wasn't as if he was afraid. Much like Zagan, who had the title of Ocean King, he too had a title that had been passed down the ages.

His current gentle and mellow demeanor was a result of him gaining sentience and thus being able to suppress his urges, but that was not how history had described him. Back in his youth, when he was a little wild, due to his inborn hatred for light he hunted down and fought with many Sol birds. In fact, he had hunted them and managed to kill so many young ones that the divine energy flowing through their bodies had altered his own body, making him immune to heat, and giving him an aspect of divinity. Thus, he was called Edward, the Divine Retribution!

All of that was a way of saying that essentially, he was not a weakling. He just had new hobbies these days, and avoided fighting when possible.

"I don't know why you say we monsters are new players," he said between sips, the foam hanging on his upper lip like a mustache. "Monsters have been fighting Kraven from the very beginning. Their territories are laden with darkness since all the blasted birds left, and are like a safe haven for monsters. So many of the territories you have forsaken, we monsters have already reclaimed!"

This news came as a surprise to everyone except Lex, who had been receiving detailed briefs from Rick about his conversations with Edward.

"Free from the interference of your races, and with only the Kraven who are more focused on expansion than maintaining their lands, we have founded our own country! We thought it would be hard, but since the Kraven always focus on invading your lands, they can barely spare the power to fight us. In fact, the horde of immortal Kraven also bypassed our lands entirely, still only focusing on you! It was quite convenient. It won't be long before the realm is held by not only seven major races, but eight!"

A shocking silence filled the room as everyone tried to wrap their heads around what the monster was saying! They had never, not once, taken the monsters seriously. They had existed for millions, or even hundreds of millions of years but there had never been a precedent as such! Why were these unusual things happening now?

"Oh wait, if you count the Kraven, that makes nine races."

Lex was all too content to fade into the background and continue to listen to the conversation between rulers, but something unusual grabbed his attention. Two especially powerful immortals entered the Inn. Though they looked like normal humans, for some reason Lex could not focus on their appearance at all! He teleported away to address the situation.

"The Kraven will never be counted as a dominant race of this realm! They are not rulers, they are nothing but vile vermin! They are a plague, nothing but a virus that has infected this realm, spreading disease and absorbing its life force. A pest dedicated to being the biggest nuisance it can be. But in the end, that's all they'll ever be. It's only a matter of time before they're wiped out!" said Kritter, his voice absolutely dripping with hate and disgust.

There was no race that hated the Kraven quite as much as the Poloids, and even among them Kritter was especially hateful. Even now, he was restraining himself because of the company he was in.

"It is not up to a loser to define the place of a winner," said a soft yet firm voice, startling not only Kritter, but everyone in the room!

Until they heard the voice, no one even noticed the arrival of the two new guests who had joined them. A handsome man stood next to a beautiful woman, both radiating an aura of power and peace. They stood casually yet it was as if they demanded absolute worship and obedience. Moreover, none of them could recall the appearance of these two!

"It is an honor to meet you, Lord Firin," Cornelius said looking at the man, his voice both humble and solemn. "Likewise, Lady Aizel, I am extremely honored. I have always wanted to meet you both."

The rest of the leaders also all extended their greeting - all except Edward who only looked at the two with a mix of aggression and fear!

Lex, who had already met the two, did not say much but he completely understood the feeling these leaders were experiencing. After all, to ensure there were no problems, Lex had scanned these two guests as soon as he went to them. The results had surprised him.

Name: Firin

Age: 1,430,000,001

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Earthen Deity (Earth Immortal Equivalent)

Species: Sol Bird

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: A true worshiped deity! No mortal may gaze upon the face of a deity - in case they are ugly and not worthy of worship!

Name: Aizel

Age: 1,430,000,001

Sex: Female

Cultivation Details: Earthen Deity (Earth Immortal Equivalent)

Species: Frio bird

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: A true worshiped deity! No mortal may gaze upon the face of a deity - in case she is too beautiful and you fall in love with a grandma that predates your entire ancestry!

He had no idea how they knew about this meeting, considering he never sent them an invite, but the primogenitors of the Sol and Frio bird had arrived to attend the meeting. Moreover, their arrival had confirmed a suspicion Lex had which was that the Sol and Frio birds were deities.

But based on that logic, weren't there... too many deities in the Crystal realm? He was under the impression that deities were rare and powerful, but it seemed not. To be fair, he had drawn conclusions without doing much research on the matter, something he would remedy soon.

But now, looking at them, another suspicion formed in Lex's mind. Once, long ago, he found a seemingly ordinary rock which produced the divine essence, something he had used on himself and even sold at the Inn. Now he had confirmed that the realm was teeming deities in the form of Sol and Frio birds, though he suspected the original two were the only ones that counted as 'true deities'. Considering the very limited time he had spent here, there was a very real possibility that there were many more deities here as well. Maybe the Crystal realm... was especially suited to giving birth to deities.

Depending on how easy or hard that was in other realms, that may be a significant feature someone from a stronger realm might covet.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 706: Glow

"There is no reason to focus so much on unnecessary etiquette," Firin said in response to everyone greeting him and expressing how honored they were to meet him. For too long neither he nor Aizel left their abode within the Crystal nation, so only the most privileged of the Crystal race had the opportunity to meet them.

"Instead our time would be better served focusing on the purpose of this meeting."

No one took offense to the bluntness displayed by Aizel. All the races in the entire realm depended on the Sol and Frio birds, so no one was about to pick a fight with the first ever Sol bird. Besides, there was one simple truth in life that no one could deny, which was that might was right. Firin was the oldest living, and one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful being in their realm.

With both the power to forcefully suppress them, and the influence to damn their entire race to the darkness, not to mention the fact that he was literally a deity, he could walk into any room and take

complete command, and no one would object. Well, almost no one since Lex was more intrigued than intimidated by him.

"Indeed, now that all the relevant parties are here, we should officially begin," said Cornelius.

Lex twitched his lips. He was enjoying their previous discussions as he was learning so much without putting in any effort. Nevertheless, there was no point in delaying the matter.

"Very well, since you're all here, we should delve right into it and stop wasting time," said Lex as he took control of the conversation.

From within his pocket he took out the invitation that had been sent out, attracting everyone's attention to the latent aura contained within.

"I'm sure everyone is quite concerned about the 'darkness that ripples through the lands'," he said quoting the invite, while simultaneously opening the invitation so that Firin and Aizel could read the content, "while you're also no doubt wondering about why the invite claims that the Crystal race is complicit in the conspiracy. No doubt, based on the timing of the invitation, alongside the Crystal race's long history of noninterference in the Kraven war, it is easy to assume that this meeting is regarding the Kraven."

Lex paused and looked at all the various leaders who were simply and silently looking at him, waiting for him to reveal the key information. Firin and Aizel, on the other hand, were silently reading the letter without any outward display of shock or concern over the strength contained within.

In a manner of speaking, Lex's purpose in calling them here was already complete, for the importance and relevance of this wedding had already surpassed any other simple wedding. But, if an important alliance or decision could be made today, the quest rating was no doubt going to shoot up so Lex was still going to try his best and manipulate the situation to his advantage. And, if in the meantime, he somehow learned about the anomaly then it would be like getting two birds with one stone.

"The truth is, the most pressing matter for us to face is not the Kraven, but something else."

He suddenly summoned in Toro, thus diverting everyone's attention to the Trelap.

"Some time ago, I felt an unusual aura..." slowly and in great detail, Lex began to explain how he ended up discovering the Cosmic Erosion Elixir. Before he explained what it was, he described the behavior of the liquid in great detail, and then had Toro corroborate everything he said. He even allowed Toro to be questioned by the leaders.

The only thing they could not do was produce the elixir for them to see for themselves, as it had by now evaporated.

"Intrigued by the strange liquid, I sought the advice of my senior... the one who wrote the invitations, and learnt what the liquid was. It's called Cosmic Erosion Elixir..." Lex continued on to explain in detail what the elixir was, and what its presence meant.

While he was speaking, he paid extra attention to the actions and reactions of each of the leaders. Despite their stoic expressions initially, he was able to pick out growing solemnity on their faces while he spoke. Well, for all except the birds, whose faces he could not see, and Kritter, since he did not know how to determine the expressions of an insect.

There was a reason why he expressly revealed that he himself did not write the invitations, and instead gave the credit to his mysterious 'senior'. First of all, Cornelius would know his history in the Crystal realm quite well so it was impossible to pretend as such in front of him. Secondly, he wanted to reveal the backing of the Midnight Inn, which could transport him across realms.

Sure the drawback was that they were likely to treat him with great suspicion, but since he was telling the truth - mostly - everything he said was verifiable.

Once he was finished, silence pervaded the room. Everyone was having a tough time wrapping their heads around the news that their realm itself was facing destruction. As if the Kraven invasion was not enough.

"To say that the Crystal race is complicit or even aware of this is a grave accusation," Cornelius said finally, his voice low and solemn. "How can you be sure that they are involved in this matter?"

"Of course, I cannot say for certain," said Lex while shrugging. "All I can say is that my luck must be horrible if they aren't. When I entered the Crystal realm, at the border I met Lord Belmont. Considering

my limited connection in the Crystal race, I revealed this information to him, he immediately tried to assassinate me. All I can say is that if they aren't involved in this collectively, then I must have some kind of luck to run into the one Crystal who is."

Cornelius pursed his lips for a moment before speaking once again. "Still, that's not enough information to condemn the whole race. Further investigation is needed."

Lex shrugged and said, "The realm itself is on the path to destruction because of some anomaly. I've already explained that the Elixir doesn't form under normal circumstances. For the entire realm to be suffering from some issue would require a very powerful force, or perhaps a very powerful race, to be pulling the strings from behind the scene. Think about it. I've already told you of the great benefits that the elixir can give, and that's just an accidental product formed from the situation. Imagine the kind of benefits one can possibly get if they're willing to compromise the entire realm!

"I'm not saying it necessarily is the Crystal race. After all, how so many immortal Kraven suddenly came to be is also a mystery not yet resolved."

Sabr looked absolutely horrified, as Lex's possible explanation for the immortal Kraven was the most plausible theory he had heard yet. The others, though, did not seem to give it too much thought.

"If you do not mind, I would like to verify this myself," said Firin, his voice still calm and level though he had suddenly become polite. "If you could remove the spatial formation around your tavern for a short while, I can communicate with the realm to investigate its health. Now that I know there might be some issue, it'll be easier to detect."

Lex raised an eyebrow, but then acquiesced, and temporarily disabled the formation around the tavern. A moment later, the building began to glow.

Unable to take the pressure from the ceremonies, Pvarti sped through them and began the journey portion of the day's activities. Yet the moment he stepped out of his home, hundreds of people following behind, a warm glow engulfed the town, originating from the tavern itself.

"An omen!" someone cried. "It's a good omen! The union of the lord and lady will bring light to the land! Their child will be the savior of the realm!"

As if taken by the yell, the crowd of guests turned to look at Pvarti with heated eyes. Pvarti himself, however, was cursing his stupid sister. He could always easily identify her antics!

"Just you wait," he murmured under his breath, and began thinking of potential suitors for his sister.

In the distance, a Crystal was flying towards Babylon leisurely. Since Lex had already revealed the location of his tavern, it was only a matter of time before Ezio arrived with his clone. After all, he still owed the young lad a secret. Suddenly, the horizon began to glow, and an overwhelming aura spread out from the distance.

Ezio frowned, and sped up.

A small Kraven, the size of an average lion, walked calmly through the streets of Babylon. No one had detected him so far, not to the citizens he was passing by, nor the hordes of immortals gathered for the wedding or even the many leaders from different countries.

The two deity birds might have possibly noticed him, but they could not be bothered to care about a random Kraven. As a result it was taking its time and enjoying itself while it waited for its reinforcements. Since he had already arrived here, might as well make a mess of things.

Then, incidentally, the building he was passing by began to glow.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 707: Try to be vague

Lex disabled the spatial formation which allowed the two deities to reconnect to the space of the entire realm. As they felt their connections reestablish, the two held hands and began channeling their powers.

At this proximity, Lex had to bear the full brunt of their power, which was far from easy. The only reason he didn't have to use Harden, and other abilities to resist the pressure was because he was a projection. If his clothes were normal, they would have been shredded under the weight of the two birds oppressive aura, yet since he was merely a projection, his clothes rippled softly as if they really were being buffed by the aura.

This close, other than the overwhelming oppressiveness of their aura, Lex could also distinctly feel how the divine power they channeled differed from spiritual energy. It was remarkably uniform, unlike spiritual energy which was actually a generic name for a broad range of energies that could be used for cultivation. He also felt like it would be difficult because it was about as pure as it could be, and it was also unlikely that the concentration could be increased either.

In fact, likely the only metric that changed in divine energy as one went from a certain level to a higher one was quantity. Of course, that was just Lex's guess. He could not confirm anything, as his experience with divinity was still too limited. He vaguely remembered that in the Origin realm there was a religion dedicated to the Butter Knife deity, a.k.a. Lex himself, and that the Inn was collecting accumulated divine energy on his behalf. Maybe he should try taking control of it back and see if he was able to use it.

The two birds began to emit a glow which combined together to form a white, holy light that seemed to encompass the world. The light suddenly grew in brightness, and passed through the walls of the tavern as if they were glass. Soon the entire building began to glow as the birds 'communicated with the realm', whatever that meant.

He turned to look at the others and found that each one was observing the birds with great intrigue, except for Edward whose skin seemed to be sparkling for some reason. He had a grimace on his face like he was constipated or something. Well, you couldn't ask a monster to be comfortable in so much light.

The light kept glowing for a few minutes, but just as it began to dim, another considerably powerful person entered the tavern. This should not have been a concern since many immortals would be attending the wedding, save for the fact that Lex recognized the person. It was Ezio, the Crystal race member who Lex visited in prison. Or, more likely his clone.

Lex frowned, then he sighed and teleported to him. Since he was here, he might as well be brought to the meeting as well.

By the time Lex returned, the birds had stopped glowing. But before getting into the matter, everyone looked at Lex who was now bringing a Crystal race member into the room.

"Everyone, this is Ezio. He happened to be there when Belmont tried to assassinate me. He also heard my revelation at the time. Since everyone wants to investigate thoroughly, we can ask Ezio what the crystal race has done about this issue in the time since they've learnt about it."

From his tone Ezio could tell that Lex's regard for him, as well as the Crystal race had dropped drastically, but all he could do was look smile wryly.

He was a little surprised by the dignitaries in the room, and did not need an introduction to recognize them all. After all, since his real body was stuck in prison, it had nothing better to do than keep up with current events.

"Although your argument was evidence based, the Crystal race cannot simply act on unverified information. Since then, they have begun investigating the phenomenon that you have claimed. It is only a matter of time before its veracity is verified."

"No need to bother," Firin said, his voice just barely more solemn than before. "I have already checked. The stability of the realm is greatly compromised. Due to the young nature of the realm, before the state of affairs reaches a level where the instability is obvious to the general public, the barrier on the edges of the realm will collapse and unfiltered chaos energy will destroy everything. I have never witnessed such a thing, so my calculations may be wrong, or may have overlooked certain important factors. Nonetheless, I estimate, within 70 years, the barriers will break and all life will end. The collapse of the realm itself should follow soon after."

Overwhelming shock gripped almost everyone in the room, followed quickly by extreme horror. Yet they did not exhibit their feelings in silence, as Sabr stumbled back until he hit the wall, mostly because Elena had lost control of herself and her size increased massively! The glass slipped out of Edwards hands and fell onto the floor, but no one other than Lex paid any attention to that.

70 years before the realm is destroyed! That's nothing!

"Lex, since your senior was able to identify the elixir, and explained the problem, he may have some knowledge on the matter. Is it possible to have him identify what is causing this problem?"

"My senior is busy opening up a new realm of his own," Lex said while shaking his head. "He won't be able to spare the time."

Everyone, Ezio especially, were startled upon hearing Lex's claim. Opening up his own realm? Did he mean a Minor realm and forget to say Minor? If not, they could not even imagine what level this senior was on.

Silence pervaded in the room once again. Based on what Lex could determine, many of them already seemed to have some idea of what caused the issue, but for whatever reason seemed hesitant to mention it. Even the all mighty and noble dive birds were silent.

It was Ezio, instead, who recovered the quickest from the news.

"Lex, I once told you that for every secret you share with me, I'll share one with you as well. Since the secret you shared was a big one, I'll likewise enlighten you with something significant. Many years ago, I decided that I wanted to erase from history all traces of a relationship the Crystal realm had with a certain entity."

Many in the room shivered, Cornelius included, as Ezio said those words.

"There are certain things... even I cannot say. But, to make a long story short, all my efforts were to erase reminders of a very shameful truth. The Crystal realm... is nothing but a big farm. How are farms taken care of? The soil is prepared with fertilizers and is tilled, and once the season is right, the crops are planted and the produce is allowed to grow."

For a moment he paused, as if he was having a tough time speaking, yet no one interrupted or corrected him.

"I've heard that a massive war has broken out. It seems the produce of the realm was lacking, and so special measures were taken for an especially ripe harvest this time around. Since the Kraven have arrived with countless immortals, and none of the nations seem fit to fight them off, it should soon be

time for our 'heroes' to show up and save the day. Surely we will be extremely grateful for their efforts and build monuments to their achievements."

His last sentence was ripe with sarcasm, but his eyes only depicted pain and despondence.

"You know, if you tried really hard, you could manage to be even more vague than that," said Lex in a rare display of irritation. If he had crossed the entire realm to reach the Crystal nation, and all Ezio was going to reveal to him was the badly written blurb of a random fiction novel then his irritation was justified.

Before Ezio could answer, Sabr burst out in anger, "what the hell are you talking about? Don't spout nonsense about farming and harvesting. This is the fate of the realm we're talking about, so focus. Or are you Crystal race too noble to concern yourselves with this matter too? All anyone in the Crystal realm has done for the past few hundred years is fight with the Kraven! It's only the mortals who have time for things like farming!"

Many in the room exchanged looks, but no one answered Sabr.

"I think we should focus on the matter at hand instead of getting sidetracked," said Firin, suppressing the agitated Sabr with his aura. "Lex, you managed to bring everyone here, and spread this important news. Your merits are unquestionable. Still, since you were aware of such a problem already, you must have already spent some time looking for a solution, right? The time for exchanging and discussing secrets will come later."

"Naturally, I have already looked into how this problem can be fixed," said Lex. After all, he had to ensure he remained relevant to the meeting, or once he revealed the information, the various leaders might decide to continue the meeting elsewhere.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 708: Murderous eyes

All eyes were once again on Lex. As an outsider, besides the backing of someone powerful, Lex needed something concrete to remain relevant as things progressed. One way or another, he planned on figuring out the reason for the anomaly from the group gathered here. Also, yes, it would be nice if they can save the realm, thereby ensuring the continued existence of trillions of living beings or perhaps even more.

But life would not end once he completed those tasks. He would continue with his other endeavors, and his connection with the Crystal realm would also continue to persist. In that case, the best case scenario would be if he used this current opportunity to build a strong relationship with these people.

But building a relationship wasn't enough. He had to make it so that they would be the ones to consider him an important contact to have. Having the solution to a destabilizing realm was one of the ways he planned on achieving such an image.

"Before we can fix anything, we have to identify how the problem was caused. Unless we know what exactly is causing the realm's decline, there is no solution that will work. Or at least, I don't know any way to go about it."

Instead of elaborating on the issue further, Lex became silent and stared at the group. Now it was up to them. If they knew what the issue was, they would have to tell him. If they had suspicions, they had to confirm it. If they had neither, then he would direct them. Either way, he would come out as the winner since he could complete this long pending quest.

As if to insinuate that the issue might have something to do with what they were speaking of before, Lex turned to look at Ezio.

He only had an awkward expression on his face, as if he was struggling to say something.

"Alright, I've seen enough of this," said Aizel, her voice cold and frigid. One could not say her voice was emotionless, for one could clearly discern annoyance and irritation in her voice.

"A long life at the top of the food chain has made you falsely arrogant and prideful. There is no shame in bowing one's head when one is weaker. The matter at hand is quite simple. Since you know of many matters, have you heard of Ventura?"

"I have heard of it," said Lex, refusing to elaborate on the extent of his knowledge. He remembered Luthor once brought the matter of Inn workers possibly going to Ventura to progress their study, but Lex had refused. It posed too many risks.

"It only makes sense that you have. Ventura is the foremost academy for cultivation in the entire universe. They accept students from any race so long as they are skilled or talented enough, and of course as long as you can afford their tuition. Or, if you are specially recruited or go through some scholarship program, in which case you can avail all that they have to offer for free! We even have some of their... top performing students among us." She paused, momentarily, to look at Cornelius, followed by Elena. Neither of them shied away from the stare, and continued to listen in silence as if they were not the ones being talked about.

"Such an organization, due to its massive size, naturally requires many resources. It also needs to continuously gather extremely talented students. One of the ways to do both is to assume control over a realm still in its early development, and artificially manufacture a conflict. There is no greater motivation to improve oneself than the threat of death."

Lex noticed that both Sabr and Edward reacted the strongest to the news, betraying their ignorance. Yet as Sabr was about to speak, or no doubt scream and yell, Kritter put one of its bony legs on his shoulder, as if to dissuade him. Ultimately, the Varn remained silent and kept on listening.

"You're saying that Ventura purposefully sent the Kraven here to wage war in the hopes of spurring the growth of multiple talented cultivators who could be students," Lex said calmly, as if he was making sure what he heard was correct. Yet oddly, as he spoke, his voice was devoid of all emotions.

"You probably use the academy to nurture talents, and pick out potential students for Ventura no doubt," Lex continued, looking at Cornelius.

"But, based on what I'm hearing, Ventura has no reason to want to harm the Crystal realm. For all intents and purposes, the realm is a resource they can continue to use indefinitely as it grows. They can control its history for perpetuity, and benefit for an untold number of years. Why would they give up such a cash cow?"

"Things are not so straight forward," Cornelius explained this time. "Ventura is an extremely large organization, the likes of which is beyond our understanding. As such, there are many subsidiary branches as well, such as Ventura Gold or Prima, as well as others.

"The branch that has control over the Crystal realm is Ventura Chaotic-Gold. As such, the management of Ventura falls completely under the control of that branch head for Chaotic-Gold, and he can do as he wishes. Who knows what he's thinking.

"You said yourself that the Cosmic Erosion Elixir was an extremely precious resource, but its production was mere happenstance. Who knows what other resources he can take out if he meticulously designs the destruction of the realm."

Lex pursed his lips and frowned as he considered what to do. He received no notification, which meant that the Quest was not complete. Knowing that Ventura was somehow controlling the realm to farm out students did not seem to be enough to count as figuring out what the anomaly was. He needed specific answers.

Moreover, since the anomaly was what resulted in him accidentally entering the realm from the Origin realm, he suspected it had something to do with that.

"This seems fine, but won't the students who join Ventura be resentful when they learn that Ventura was the one causing war in their realm?"

"Just because Chaotic-Gold Ventura controls this realm, it does not mean that is where students will have to go. Which academy a student is put into is the result of an extensive and rigorous test. If a student is talented enough, and contributes sufficiently to the academy, they can apply to have the realm left alone. I myself have also transitioned from a student to an aide. If I make enough contributions, or if I get promoted enough to rival the branch manager for Chaotic-Gold, I can also apply to have control of the realm transferred."

"Alright, so we have concluded that Ventura is likely the reason for the anomaly. How do we progress from here? Unless the anomaly itself is identified, there's nothing we can do to remedy the situation."

Aizel was about to continue speaking when Lex's eyes widened in horror! A massively powerful attack had landed on the formation surrounding the tavern, and instantly destroyed it! Before he could react, another attack landed on the building.

The entire tavern trembled, and even seemed to wobble as an extremely savage aura swept through it! Although the building had survived the attack, for some reason Lex did not know yet, all the windows had shattered. Much of the furniture seemed to survive inexplicably, but an immense amount of destruction was also wrought!

The spatial formation Lex used to control the space around the tavern, as well as all its protective formations and the Dragon's Wake formation had all been destroyed!

But that was far from all. As Lex entered his Overdrive state, which allowed his brain to work faster and more efficiently than normal, he swept the tavern with his senses and discovered that all of his workers were injured! Betty, Big Ben's wife, seemed to be in the worst possible condition.

He immediately teleported away, not bothering to give any one of the leaders in the room any instructions. Although the power of the attack was far beyond anything Lex could manage or even hope to handle, he was able to identify the kind of signature it carried. It bore the unique aura of a Kraven in the immortal realm. He was sure they would take care of things without his prompting.

Lex teleported over to the kitchen, where Betty and Nani lay unconscious. Looking at the scene, Lex felt extremely aggrieved as well as furious. Due to the fact that he was here as a projection, his instincts were dulled and he was not able to anticipate the attack. As a result, the worst case scenario was happening. He teleported again, this time to the only person he could give orders to at the moment.

"Rick, take the golden keys and crush them in each person's hand. Send them to the Inn immediately!"

Rick, who had a loyal follower in the form of a monster catfish, had managed to survive the attack with the least amount of damage. Though that was not saying much, as even with the protection of the monster fish, he looked like he was on death's door. Lex had already given all of his workers golden keys to use in case of an emergency. It was unfortunate that the attack had come so unexpectedly that no one had a chance to use them at all.

With orders given, Lex teleported to the roof with murder in his eyes. He wanted to see who the hell was attacking his tavern!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 709: The Innkeeper descends

A few seconds was all it took, if even that, for Lex to teleport, give Rick his orders and then teleport to the roof. But the sight that greeted him was not at all the peaceful and vibrant town of Babylon that was in the midst of a wedding celebration. Fortunately, it was not carnage either.

The town, and the entire world in fact, seemed to have lost a lot of substance. Everything had become a mirage, or projection through which they could walk. The only thing of substance that remained was the tavern, and a number of entities locked in furious battle.

A dozen Kraven were gathered outside, and were all at the immortal realm. It was their joint attacks which had completely destroyed the formations around the tavern.

Lex had no idea how exactly the tavern itself had survived the attack when even the formations failed, and could only interpret it to the Dribble Oak wood which all the wood in the tavern had been upgraded to.

But it was uncertain how long that wood would have continued to survive the onslaught if so many immortals kept attacking. But it just so happened, that within the seemingly mundane building were gathered the strongest beings in the realm, one and all!

Before the Kraven could let out their third attack, the two deities used their divine powers to isolate them from the rest of the realm, lest their fight kill all the nearby civilians. The rest of them did not hold back, and attacked with full furry.

Sabr was especially lethal, as his attacks betrayed common sense, his anger and frustrations at recent revelations warping his state of mind. Now that he had found a completely acceptable and reasonable outlet, why should he hold himself back?

It had to be noted that there were more than a few immortals in Babylon, so just a dozen Kraven should not have been able to so effortlessly infiltrate. But then again, even among the Kraven these few were far from ordinary. Moreover, they had already made preparations beforehand. All the immortals who did not happen to be inside the tavern were suffering from severely weakened powers at the moment. The Kraven had deployed a very special kind of poison in the air that only targeted immortals. Incidentally, Dribble Oak wood also cleaned and filtered the air, so no one in the tavern was affected.

By the time Lex arrived on the rooftop, all the fighters had spread out and it was as if their savagery knew no bounds. The level of this fight was way beyond Lex, and if he were in Babylon any single one of the attacks being thrown around would very seriously injure him, if not kill him outright!

Even though Lex could not be blamed for being vulnerable in front of a dozen immortals, he could not help but feel anger and frustration. Aware of the fact that such feelings won't be of any help, Lex simultaneously studied the Kraven.

There was something unusual about this small group, though he was not familiar enough with the Kraven to pick out what it was. The one thing he did pick up on was that the leader of the group was a very small Kraven that barely came up to Lex's chest. Yet dwarfism had not prevented the Kraven from being strong, as it projected the fiercest aura of the group. Clearly, he was the leader.

Yet while the others fought, the leader stood unperturbed as he looked towards the two deities. Lex clenched his fist tighter as he looked at the Kraven, for some reason reminded of his experience with Belmont. He had been slighted by him as well, though not nearly as much. Even then, Lex could not do much but play a few tricks on him. Yes, theoretically Lex could use an array that could reach the immortal level in strength.

In fact, he even had the blueprint for such an array, one of the final lessons inside the book hidden within the ring he studied arrays from. Yet he had never been able to complete it, even with all his current strengths.

What he wouldn't give to have another Butter Knife at maximum strength again, but since the knife can only be used inside the tavern, it would be useless in his current situation.

The Kraven and the birds continued to stare at each other, and Lex suspected that they were conversing in spirit sense.

"It's done," said Rick weakly, as he entered the roof. He looked pale and was out of breath, but his weakness had not stopped him from acting as quickly as possible.

Lex, whose original body was still inside the Inn, scanned it and quickly checked up on all his workers. It wasn't that he could ignore his guests who had been hurt at the tavern, but that he only had a limited number of keys at the tavern as he had not expected such a disaster.

All of them were in the Recovery room, being healed. But just that alone did not guarantee that they would survive. Even tolerating the aura of an immortal could damage the spirit of a mortal, as everyone had suspected of Lex when he first arrived in the Crystal realm.

Suddenly, he stopped and he felt his heart plunge. While their survival was still in question, there was at least one thing that could be confirmed. Betty, Big Ben's wife, who had been expecting, suffered a miscarriage!

An ominous cloud began covering the skies at the Inn. Anyone who was familiar with the Inn's history began wondering who had crossed the Innkeeper this time. Maybe there would be something interesting to gossip about soon.

But no, the enemy of the Innkeeper was not inside the Inn this time, and Lex had almost no way of harming him. Almost.

He used Targeted scan on the lone Kraven, just to see if he could learn anything about him.

Name: Belail Sacrin

Age: 17

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???

Species: Kraven

Remarks: Special material detected on target. Acquire to trigger a special quest!

"Rick, use the card I gave you earlier," said Lex, his voice deep and filled with suppressed emotions.

Without asking any questions, Rick reached into his pocket and pulled out an ordinary-looking business card. Yet when he began channeling his spirit energy into the card, things quickly changed.

Sensing the same aura they had seen in the invitation Lex showed them, the deities who were negotiating with the Kraven suddenly turned to look back. On the roof stood two figures, Lex and Rick. Yet a moment later, another projection joined them.

The unique, isolated realm they had created around the battlefield trembled for a moment, as a being much more powerful appeared within. It was, of course, the Innkeeper.

Like he had done when Luthor and the rest were heading off to war, Lex had given Rick one of the Innkeeper's business cards when he went out to deliver invitations just in case he ran into trouble. He had not needed it then, but it came in handy now.

Although Lex knew that he had no real power, as the Innkeeper or even as his projection, the system held up to its promise of maintaining a powerful facade. The aura emitted by the projection was quite real, to the point where it began affecting the Crystal realm.

For a realm that could not support even a Heaven Immortal, the Innkeeper and his associated strength were too much. The clouds in the sky started quivering, as if the clouds themselves were boiling, and a red hue colored the sky, far past the horizon.

In that moment, across the Crystal realm, all monsters suppressed their raving hunger and hid. In that moment, even the most gloriously shining Sol or Frio bird withdrew its feathers, and dove into a hole to hide. In that moment, the congress in the Crystal realm came to a halt as their protective formations sent out warnings of impending danger. In that one moment, when the Innkeeper's incarnation descended onto the Crystal realm, all life seemed to cower.

Belail, the Kraven who stood so confidently in front of the two divine birds, looked up and saw not a person, but a vision of his own death.

In the Origin realm, a Bravenharbinger, stood in its study, meticulously polishing its weapon. Bravenharbingers were a race of tall, centaur-like creatures with six legs instead of four, four arms instead of two, and six eyes. The males were often 12 feet (3.6 meters) tall while their females were around 8 feet (2.4). They had rough gray skin, and usually had long black hair.

Like most in his race, this one was fond of close combat, and his weapon was a double-sided blade, meaning a blade extended from both sides of its handle. The blade was eight inches wide (20 cm) and five feet (1.5 meters) long on each side. Within the polished blade, a smiling reflection of its master was visible. But suddenly, that smile turned into shock.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 710: Games

The isolated realm in which the battle was being fought ultimately did not collapse, but even if it had it would not matter too much as the fighting had come to a halt. The Kraven retreated, and surrounded Belail as they looked up in fear. The various leaders too were stunned still and looked up at the tavern roof.

None of them ever doubted Lex's mysterious elder for even a moment, if not for any other reason than because Lex alone would not be able to source the wood for his own tavern. Wood from a tree that specifically required immortals to cut it down was far from simple, and the wood received from it was the least of its boons.

Cornelius specially believed Lex had a mysterious background, for he himself had many unique life experiences, and knew the benefits a solid backing afforded one. Although such a background did not take away from the many feats Lex accomplished while at the academy, they did certainly explain why he had the capacity to perform them.

But having a mysterious elder, or a strong background, was one thing. Having the entire realm strain under the pressure of a single entity's descent was quite another! Currently, they and the entire realm were at the mercy of this elder!

The 'elder' looked down at everyone, his anger threatening to boil out. He wanted nothing more than to smash the Kraven into pudding with an earthshaking punch. But his anger did not make him a fool, nor did the reaction of the realm blind him to the truth that he was not actually as strong as he appeared. He only had the aura of the Innkeeper. While the aura could be used for intimidation, and perhaps a few other minor things, it certainly could never be used to attack.

As the Innkeeper, Lex looked to his left and saw his own projection there as well. It was a strange sensation looking at a projection of yourself, through yet another projection of yourself, while your mind was connected to both projections. The Innkeeper then turned and looked at the two deities, before turning his gaze to Belail.

"I usually ignore the games of children," said the Innkeeper, the usual warmth in his voice turning to bone chilling indifference. "But what I cannot ignore is that your games hurt my people."

He spoke no more, as if his purpose was to clarify that this matter was too far beneath him, and that he would have stayed uninvolved if the matter had not escalated to this degree.

Lex had made preparations in case there was trouble, but summoning the incarnation of the Innkeeper was not in his plans. Instead, he had used the scale given by Zagan, and sent Rick out to gather a large number of monsters who would be obedient to whoever held the scale. As weaker monsters, they would naturally defer to the wishes of stronger ones. As a result, some distance from Babylon a small horde of incredibly strong monsters were waiting to be summoned.

According to his original plan, if anything were to happen, he would use his formations to stall them while he summoned his monsters to provide aid. Now though, such a plan would no longer suffice.

The new plan, however, still started with Zagan's scale. He held out his hand, and without prompting Rick handed the incarnation the scale. Without even looking at it, Lex focused all the Innkeeper's aura and surrounded it with the aura, and spoke.

"This scale belongs to Zagan, once a monster of the Crystal realm, now my employee. In exchange for working for me, I allowed him to safely cross the tribulations and enter the Heaven Immortal realm. In the future, there will be more benefits waiting for him."

Although the Innkeeper spoke softly, it seemed to transmit from the scale and to each and every monster in the realm. The Innkeeper's aura was causing a strain on the entire realm, which meant there was nowhere in the realm free from his range. By adding the aura of the scale and his voice to the mix, he was able to transmit both across the realm. Of course, only the strongest of the strong could actually detect the aura.

"Whosoever claims the head of the Kraven Belail can avail such an opportunity as well."

Just as the Innkeeper finished his message, the scale crumbled as if it could no longer bear the burden it was under. The Innkeeper, too, was ready to depart. The trick about maintaining a mysterious and

powerful image was to give others as little information as possible to study. The more time he spent here, the more clues he would leave.

Yet just as he was about to depart, his senses picked up something, and he looked up. Above him, in the sky outside the isolated realm, there was a small patch that seemed unaffected by the red hue coloring the sky. The fact that such a tiny patch remained unaffected by the Innkeeper's aura was highly suspicious, but other than looking at it, Lex did nothing. There was no point in pursuing such a matter. The incarnation disappeared.

Inside Lex's heart, his anger still remained. Instead of Belail, he wanted all the perpetrators to suffer. But he knew that his means were limited, and using the Innkeeper's identity came with the restrictions of acting as someone of such a station.

He said himself that he disdained to act against 'children' and so he was giving out a slight punishment, which suited his image as someone far above the current situation. If, instead, he targeted everyone, he would seem petty. In that case, it would not make sense that he did not just kill them all himself.

Unable to do much more, the incarnation of the Innkeeper vanished, and the realm finally returned to normal.

As if he had been freed from some massive restraint, Belail took out a skull from a spatial tool and crushed it, teleporting himself and his retinue far away from the place. The fight ended just as abruptly as it began.

Somewhere far away, well within the territory of the Kraven, they reappeared.

"Find out what was the reason for sending to that damned place!" Belail roared at his follower, as he felt like he had fallen victim to some grand conspiracy. "And have the fort employ its maximum security measures. I'm going to the panic room!"

"Sire, isn't that... isn't that a little too much? We're back in our own territory now. Surely you have nothing to fear," said one of the other Kraven.

"Underestimating the enemy is the quickest way to die. We have not yet touched upon the deeper secrets of the Crystal realm. Do not fool yourself into thinking the realm is already ours," Belail replied, his voice filled with anxiety and irritation. Without waiting for more questions, he began to run. If only he could have escaped from this realm entirely, but that was not possible anymore. Inside his heart, Belail cursed out Ventura as he kept running.

The deepest, darkest corner of the Crystal realm was a place that had never seen light, from the moment of the realms inception. It was a place so deeply guarded, so cleverly hidden, that there was no one, immortal or deity, who could find it if they did not already know of its location.

In such a place, there was a temple. The size of the temple was not too large, and was approximately the same as the Earth's moon. Surrounding the temple for millions of miles was one, continuous horde of monsters, all kneeling and looking down. For hundreds of millions of years these monsters had existed, and in their entire existence, they had never the courage to look up. Even as the ages passed, and they reached the immortal realm, the monsters remained as docile as possible.

The entire existence was merely centered around worship. The target of their never ending worship was a black bird, oddly similar in its physique to the Sol and Frio birds, though the element this bird had an affinity for was darkness.

Vinei, the deity of darkness, opened its eyes and all the monsters worshiping it outside trembled. It had felt an aura so overwhelmingly powerful, he was convinced it could free him from the chains of this realm. For a deity, transcending realms was nigh impossible, but with such a powerful ally, it just might be possible.

"Assemble," it whispered, and the largest army to ever appear in the Crystal realm stood up from their kneeling position for the first time in their lives.

Above Babylon, in the sky, two figures seemed to be looking down at everything. One of them was the Bravenheart from the Origin realm, while the other was a figure shrouded in mist.

"Head master, did that... did that person actually detect us?" the Bravenheart asked, shock riling in his heart.

"No need to pay him any attention," the Headmaster said, perfectly calm. "Since he only sent an incarnation here, and did not act out personally, he has shown enough respect to the rules of Ventura. We will not pursue this matter, and he will not interfere in our matters either. After all, between beings of our level, we must show a certain level of understanding for one another."

The projection of the Headmaster disappeared. He had too many realms to overlook, and could not spend much time dealing with minor problems. Only when matters reached the level of Dao were they barely able to attract his attention.