

Innkeeper 71

The Innkeeper

Chapter 71: Love Birds

Velma led the two teenagers into the manor and after providing a quick summary of everything they offered, she quickly took them to the Gift shop. Since Velma was giving the tour, Gerard was behind the counter awaiting his customers patiently. The gift shop was small, and with only 11 items on display the shop looked almost empty but each of the items was very eye-catching.

Ayesha and Haris looked at the items with interest, and were amazed when a description of each item appeared directly in their minds when they focused on them. The Babys candy and Zombie cores were dismissed by them directly. The Golden Key, however, attracted their attention immediately. A key that let them enter the Inn as they pleased, from anywhere in the universe, was exactly what the duo needed to organize their secret reunions at the Inn. Without any hesitation Ayesha bought two keys and gave one to Haris. Instead of paying with a credit card, as the guests before her had been doing, she opened up her purse and took out a jade bottle. She opened the top and with a dripper took out a single drop of a clear liquid from the bottle. Before she could explain what the liquid was, the single drop mysteriously disappeared from the dripper.

Gerard smiled and said, "Your payment has been accepted, but you have a remaining credit balance of around 10,000MP. Would you like to keep the credit for further purchases or would you like your change?"

"You can keep it for now," Ayesha said, putting the jade bottle along with her Golden Key back.

"Hey Ayesha look at this," Haris said with excitement in his eyes. He was looking at a pair of prosthetic wings. In the display case their size had been reduced so they didn't attract too much attention, but once Haris learned what they did he was enamored. Ayesha looked not at the wings but at the silly, excited boy - her gaze soft and loving.

"We'll take two of those as well," she said, pointing at the wings. Once she received the wings in card form the two lovers looked at everything else the Gift Shop had to offer. Botlam Dew, one of the most popular items and Lex's personal favorite, was dismissed by the kids as none of them were hurt and didn't really have a need for it. The Serene whistle, the item that helps with taming beasts, aroused some interest but not enough to purchase. The Whistle of Bathelona, however, attracted Ayesha's interest and she bought it for herself.

The Whistle of Bathelona was a one of a kind item that summoned a wisp named Bathelona, which was a popular pet for children in the Jotun system - at least that's what the description said. Haris bought the Saturn Cake, but with his credit card instead of using Ayesha's tab, and put the cake that had been turned into a card for convenience into his pocket.

With that they had seen everything in the Gift shop and left the manor excitedly.

"Can we explore the rest on our own?" Haris asked Velma.

"Of course, please enjoy yourselves. If you need me at any time, you only need to call out my name and I will appear by your side."

"Thanks, we will," Haris said politely. He turned to Ayesha who handed him a pair of Icarus' wings and he quickly attached them on his back. Putting them on was easy, all he had to do was touch his back to them and they would automatically attach themselves. They linked themselves to his mind so he could control them seamlessly, and before you knew it the pair was ready to take flight.

The pair looked at each other and smiled. They were feeling slightly nervous but also extremely excited. They were gonna take each other's hand before taking off, but Velma suggested they get a hang of flying before trying something like that. It would be embarrassing if they crashed into each other right at take off. Ayesha stuck her tongue out and then took off. The speed of her ascent was phenomenal, and it was as if she had spent her entire life flying. Haris took off as well, chasing after her as if they were playing a game of tag. The two young lovers soared through the sky, grinning and smiling as they chased after one another. The two were quickly joined by a pandemonium of parrots who flew around them gazing curiously at the two new giant birds.

Ayesha laughed as she saw the parrots flying around her, and she started leading them around. They did barrel rolls and nose dives, experimenting as their skill in flight grew. The sounds of laughter filled the Inn and Helen, who was sitting in a lawn chair with a rabbit in her lap, looked up to see what looked like two humans with wings flying around, playing in the air. Her jaw dropped in shock as she tried to absorb what she was seeing. The two kids were too far away for her to see properly, so she could not tell that what was on their backs were prosthetics. She imagined that these were visitors from somewhere else in the universe who looked like angels.

Hugo, who was still with Will, heard the sound of laughter as well and came out to investigate. He was taken aback when he saw two kids flying in the air, but not as much as Helen. He already accepted that the Inn was a magical place, so he would not be surprised even if he saw stranger things. Right now what he wanted to do was to continue cultivating, but it was important he be there when Will recovered so returned to the RP room.

When the two kids were done playing in the air, they started flying over the Inn grounds, admiring the scenery, hand in hand. Holding hands in the air was MUCH harder than they had imagined as their wings kept colliding, but ultimately they got the timing and rhythm required to do so.

From the air the Inn looked very simple, yet beautiful. There were only two significant landmarks that attracted their interest. The hills, covered in a field of flowers which gave off a feeling of seclusion and serenity. The Meditation room on top of the hill looked interesting as well. The second landmark was the forest. The two flew towards the forest and were interested when they saw a clearing in the center, but for some reason as they started to fly towards the clearing they would always diverge. It was strange, all they had to do was fly straight, but somehow whenever they got close to the middle they would turn away without realizing and somehow wind up at the exit. After trying a couple of times, the kids gave up and started looking for a nice spot for a picnic.

They chose a spot underneath the shade of a tree and the two kids, exhausted from their adventure, sat down side by side. Haris took out a card from his pocket and summoned the cake. Ayesha called Velma, who brought them a blanket, some plates, utensils and drinks. The two kids had never tasted such freedom before, and would remember this relatively simple day for the rest of their lives. Velma, who left the two kids to enjoy each other's company, kept looking out towards them - hoping that the kids would call her so she could hear more of their cheesy lines.

Lex sighed as he stepped out the skyscraper, feeling tired. As one could imagine, his interview did not go too well. He was unable to answer why he was covered in blood, why he registered so many weapons under his name, why he bought so much tactical gear or what his relationship with Marlo was. To be honest, even he started to think of himself as a suspicious character after realizing how much information they had on him. He thought he was being sneaky, but there was a very clear trail of all his activities. Of course, there was no proof he had done anything wrong or unlawful otherwise Bluebird would have called him in for questioning the way they had taken in Matilda, but Lex did not know that.

The interviewers did not reject him outright, but only said that they would contact him after reviewing his profile, but he was under no delusion that he would be able to get in. If he had been paying

attention, he would have been clued in on how his interview was going to go right at the beginning. After all, his three interviewers had introduced themselves as Irrelevant Character A, Irrelevant Character B and Irrelevant Character C. For some reason he had casually accepted their names, as if there was no obvious fourth wall being broken right there.

"So what are you going to do now?" asked Mary, with a concerned look.

"Well, I'm a little disappointed, but there's an even easier solution than looking for someone else. I'll just live at the Inn. Who says I need a home on Earth? I can just come back whenever I need to do something. This way, no one will ever be able to track me."

Mary nodded, as if she liked his answer. Lex grinned to himself, and then disappeared.

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Chapter 72: Upgrade the Dating spot

Haris and Ayesha were both lying down on their picnic blanket, looking up at the parrots in the trees above them. All the parrots in the Inn had gathered on the tree above the teenagers, as if acknowledging the pair as their leaders. After flying around everywhere they were already exhausted, and once they had their little picnic the duo felt sleepy. They didn't actually go to sleep, but they lay there, enjoying each other's company silently. As compared to their earlier enthusiastic and cheesy selves, they were a lot more sombre.

"We should head back," Haris said eventually, his voice reluctant.

"When will your family head out?"

"Tonight, probably."

"Do you know where you'll be going?"

"They'll probably send me to some academy. I'll probably be under supervision until that's done."

Ayesha didn't reply, but only nodded. Haris spent a few more minutes struggling - he had something he wanted to say, but he couldn't bring himself up to say it. Despite all his earlier bravado, he was still just a teenager and his experiences in life were limited - he could not help but be afraid of certain things.

Even without looking at him Ayesha could tell there was something on his mind. She waited a few minutes to see if he spoke on his own, but when he continued to hesitate she said, "Don't keep your thoughts hidden. Secrets are not good for your soul, say whatever you want to say."

Haris turned to look at his beloved, and she turned to look back at him. The two kids stared in each other's eyes in silence until Haris finally spoke.

"Ayesha do you think we're making a mistake? I mean you... I'm just....just..."

Ayesha chuckled. "Who put these doubts in your mind? Was it your parents? Or was it mine? Are you trying to say I could have anyone, so why should I be with you?"

Haris didn't reply, but the worried look on his face said it all.

"If I can be with anyone, then why can't I be with you? What's the point of being rich, of being powerful, if you still can't do what you want? If you're forced to do things you don't want to do just to keep your status or power, then aren't you just a slave to those things? My parents think I don't know better because I'm young, but just because I'm young doesn't mean I'm wrong. Or are your concerns different? Is there something else on your mind?"

Haris shook his head and said, "I'm not afraid of anything else, not my parents, not hardship or struggle...but I'm afraid...I'm afraid that one day I will be your regret."

Ayesha smiled as she caressed the young man's face with her hand. "As long as you love me the way that you do, I will never regret being with you."

The two kids smiled as they finished pouring their hearts out to each other. It would be a while before they got to spend time with one another again. Eventually the two left, and both received a key additional to the one they had bought because they both had made purchases in the Gift shop.

Mere moments after the duo left, Lex arrived back at the Inn. He took in a deep breath, and after holding it in for a few seconds, let out a relieved sigh.

"The air is so much better here," Lex commented to the flying hologram around him.

"Living at the Inn is fine, but what will you do about your family?"

"The only reason there is any focus on me at all is because of Marlo. I'll wait till he returns and have him clear everything up. Once the focus is off of me, I'll think of something. I don't want to introduce them to cultivation till I'm strong enough to protect them."

"Makes sense," Mary said, nodding.

"I see my MP has gone up again. What did I miss while I was gone?"

Mary summoned Velma, who gave Lex a detailed report of Haris and Ayesha. She did not get any additional information about them because only Lex could see his guests statuses, but Lex was sure that there was more than met the eye with the teenagers, especially considering that Ayesha left a tab of 10,855MP! Lex would not have access to that MP till she actually used it up, but her balance would be saved and she could use it at any time.

When he learned about their flying adventures he was slightly surprised, and then relieved to hear about the fact that they could not enter the Greenhouse even while flying. It would take someone who had a deep understanding of arrays to manoeuvre through the forest.

Lex also had some ideas when he thought of his guests flying around the Inn. Using the design interface he added a few permanent clouds in the sky, and introduced a looping air current. If his guests ever flew, they could ride the aircurrent and it would be like a ride. Having a few clouds in the air would also add a little more variety. He also decided to introduce a few more animals and birds.

Love birds, pigeons and peacocks appeared magically throughout the Inn. But he wasn't done yet, he created a small, crystal clear lake near the Recovery room and introduced some cute looking fish. He didn't know many fish except for Goldfish, and would need to research about which would be a good addition to his lake. For now the lake was small and shallow, as he didn't have much space, but in the

future he planned on expanding it. He placed a row boat in the lake, and then smiled to himself. If the two teenagers came back for another date, at least they would have a few more things to do. All the upgrades cost him 1500MP, but it was totally worth it. Lex could not help but imagine himself bringing a girl to the Inn for a date in the future, unaware that he wore a silly grin on his face. Everyone who saw him could guess exactly what the Innkeeper was thinking, and resisted the urge to facepalm.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 73: The reclamation has begun

Once Lex was satisfied with his changes in regards to making a dating spot, he turned his attention back to the Inn. Currently of his rooms, two were still booked under Bastet and Falaks name, one was booked by Hugo and one was booked by Alexander. That left only one regular room free which he was planning on booking for himself in the short term, but he didn't want to leave the Inn with no free rooms available. He spent 1000MP to buy two regular rooms, but instead of the first floor with the rest of the rooms, he placed them alone in separate parts of the Inn. He got this idea when he thought about Helen, who seemed to want to stay away from everyone. A secluded room would award her and anyone else who wanted it with their privacy. Lex asked Velma to ask Helen if she'd like to shift her room to one of the secluded ones.

Once that was done, he booked the room for himself for a week. Like regular guests he had to pay 50MP per day for the room, but since the profit from each room was also 50MP he basically suffered no loss. It was a strange loophole which would allow him to have a room for himself at the Inn forever, but the downside was he would have one less room for his guests. He teleported to the room directly and lay down on the bed.

He was exhausted, more mentally than physically. He went through all the things that he needed to do in his head. Bastets' and Falaks' rooms only had a few more days until their reservation was over, which would free up two of his rooms. It was disappointing, Lex was hoping to get closer to them, but probably for the best as well since his cultivation was too low.

Speaking of cultivation...Lex let out a sigh and picked himself off the bed. Reluctantly he spent another 1500MP and bought the Training room, leaving him with a total of 6016MP left. He thought about where to place it, he didn't want to put it close to the Meditation room or cultivation room as he wanted to keep traffic in those places at a minimum. After thinking for a short while, he created a walkway near the manor that led towards the main gate. When he was satisfied with the distance, he put the Training room at the end of the path. He decided that all future additions to the Inn would be close together. In the future he would eventually form a street with all his main attractions on both ends. Maybe if the Inn grew big enough, he would redesign it to the shape of a town.

The Training room was a plain looking, square building. On the inside it was well lit despite the lack of any windows, and had a wooden floor. There were five wooden dummies in the shape of humans standing on the far end, five wooden dummies in the shape of wolves on his right and five wooden dummies in the shape of giant birds on his left. He set the price for the training room at 200MP with a profit of 100MP, and became his own first customer. He needed to exhaust himself continuously for his body to adapt to his cultivation, and could no longer afford to laze around.

He started his combat training fighting against one human dummy for now. He could select the strength of the attacking dummy all the way to the peak of Qi training, but for now settled for the dummy being slightly stronger than himself. He also had the option to use wooden weapons, but settled for hand-to-hand combat. Even now he was not actually combat trained, but this training dummy would automatically train him.

Somewhere on Vegus Minima, two men stood with arms folded in front of a small team of soldiers. The soldiers all had their guns pointed towards the two men, yet it was the team of soldiers who were more anxious. The soldiers were all on various levels of Qi training, while the two men were in the Foundation realm. The soldiers had no way of knowing how strong the two men really were, but it was fair to say that the soldiers basically stood no chance of winning a fight. At most, they would be able to injure or wound the two men.

"I'm going to ask you one last time," said one of the two men, his voice full of suppressed rage, "where did you get that ring?"

One of the soldiers was wearing a gold ring on his hand, with a ruby carved in the shape of a dragon on it. The man speaking was Brother Chen, and the reason he had his arms folded was to keep himself from attacking the soldiers and ripping them limb from limb. The ring used to belong to Brother Chen's father, but after his father passed away his sister took it and started wearing it on a chain around her neck.

The two soldiers had been searching for their lost caravan since they had returned from the Inn, with no luck. Their tracks had been destroyed and there was no sign of them anywhere. Despite searching for days the two had no luck, right up until they ran into these soldiers while scavenging in the ruins of an old town.

Meeting unfamiliar survivors was always a risky business on vegus Minima, as humans were just as dangerous as zombies, if not more. These soldiers however attracted the two mens attention because of

their unusually neat gear as well as advanced weapons. They even handled themselves with a coordination that spoke of military training. Such things were so rare that Brother Chen and Blane had never encountered them their entire lives. This was because there was no actual military to speak of, each settlement only had a ragtag bunch of people who had somehow managed to raise their cultivation. When they approached to make inquiries, both of them immediately recognized the ring. That's when the confrontation started.

"I'm telling you, I bought it at the reclamation outpost," the man spoke, hiding the nervousness in his voice. Despite the fear he felt, his training prevented him from backing down. "This land is being reclaimed by the Jotun Empire, and all settlements and survivors are being relocated. Since you have not encountered the..."

"Bullsh*t!" Brother Chen roared. "Lily would never sell her ring, and I've never heard of this Jotun Empire! This is your last warning, tell me how you got the ring or I won't bother being polite with you anymore!"

The soldiers tightened their position and kept their aim, ready for combat at any moment. "I'm telling you, follow us to the reclamation outpost and you can see for yourself. A new country is being founded on this land, reclamation work has begun. In the future you will be citizens of the Jotun Empire, but if you dare to attack soldiers of the Empire then despite your cultivation you will not be spared."

Blane and Brother Chen shared a look, as if unsure whether to believe the soldier or not. A country being formed? That was the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard, no one had the strength to fight off the zombie hordes that would be attracted to such a massive gathering of people. Under normal circumstances they would have already labeled these soldiers as liars and attacked them, yet these circumstances were anything but normal. The two had just returned from a mystical land that could transport guests from all over the universe, and met the most ridiculously powerful people. If that were possible...a country being formed didn't seem so farfetched.

The question now was, should they follow the soldiers to confirm their stories? If they were lying, the two would no doubt be led to a trap that would spell their doom. But the two had Golden keys that would allow them to escape any trap, so they were considering it.

Eventually Blane was the one who spoke, "Alright then, take us to the reclamation outpost you're talking of. But know this, if you're lying then even if we're unable to escape, we have more than enough ways to kill you!"

The soldiers finally relaxed a little at hearing the news. The captain of this squad, who had been speaking with Brother Chen earlier, took out a transponder and said, "Home base this team reclamation team 6, we have found two Foundation realm survivors. Requesting immediate extraction, over."

"Copy that reclamation team, a Slingshot is on the way, over."

The soldier put the communication device away and looked back at the two angry men.

"There will be some paperwork when you enter the outpost, and you'll need to fill in your data. If the person you're looking for...this 'Lily' has been to the reclamation outpost then her data should also be in the database. You'll be able to contact her from there."

The two nodded, but still kept their guard up. The story these soldiers were telling was too fantastical. They had spent their entire lives, fighting and running, with only very little time spent in settlements because of how rare they were. Now they were being told that an entire country was being established. Despite their recent experiences, they found it a little hard to believe.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 74: First trial

Lex continued to fight with the training dummy for hours. After his initial burst of energy, he stopped trying to learn combat from it and simply just focused on survival. Every now and again he'd take a break due to exhaustion, but after lying down for around twenty minutes in the Training room he'd get back up again. By evening he was so physically drained that he decided to end it for the day. He teleported to his room and drew himself a bath, falling asleep almost the instant he lay down in the tub. Only a few moments later, he disappeared from the bathtub and reappeared in the white room where he first cultivated.

Even though he was already asleep, a sedative was injected into his arm to ensure he did not wake up during the process. Instead of tubes connecting to his body like last time, a metallic helmet was attached to his head which began softly vibrating. The first procedure he underwent affected his body, while the second one would affect his spirit. The third would affect his soul, and the final procedure would merge his body, soul and spirit into one entity that had the characteristics of all three. After the fourth procedure was complete, Lex would finally gain control of his cultivation and would have to consciously cultivate to grow his strength. That, however, was a matter for a later time.

William Benthon, for the first time in many many years, woke up without the sensation of pain in his body. It was so surreal that initially he did not even realize he was awake and that this was not a dream. When he finally did realize what was happening, he raised his arm and looked at it in disbelief. He pinched himself, just to ensure this was real and when he felt the sharp sensation of pain run through his body he did not wince but instead laughed. He felt light as a feather, and in better health than even when he was young. His cultivation had regressed, yes, but with his resources it would take him no time at all to restart.

He exited the Recovery Pod(RP) and found Hugo patiently waiting for him on the side.

"How do you feel?" the man asked.

"Like a young man," Will replied, jumping onto the ground. Then, so amused by the sensation, he jumped a few more times to test his body. His back wasn't jolted by the shock of the movement, his knees didn't hurt and his muscles didn't ache. This truly was much better than he even hoped for.

"Come, show me around this place." Will said, as he exited the room. A part of the soul contract for Hugo was to explore whatever the golden key led to, but afterwards he would become Will's body guard. Hugo's temperament and experience didn't really make him suitable as a bodyguard, but he was strong enough for the job and that's all that really mattered.

"This place has changed somewhat," Hugo commented, looking at the small lake outside the Recovery Room (RR). "I think it would be better if we let the staff show us around." With that, he called for Gerard to give him and the old man a tour. Gerard showed up driving the golf cart, secretly quite satisfied with the opportunity to drive this vehicle around.

"This lake is for resting, and for fishing," Gerard commented as he began his tour. "The Innkeeper is usually busy, off visiting other worlds, but every time he returns he improves the Inn to better cater to his guests. This lake is one of his newer additions to the Inn's environment, but he has not fallen behind in adding new services for his guests as well."

Gerard drove them around to the Training room, the meditation room, the forest and finally the Mystery trial. Along the way they encountered Helen as well, who was surrounded by peacocks. Will

asked about her but Gerard commented that he is not at liberty to discuss other guests. Gerard did let him know that if he was interested he could go and talk to her, but Will put it off for later. He was curious about the Mystery trial and decided that he would enter, but decided to wait till he saw the Gift Shop.

As expected, he was very interested in the items he saw there. He had no use for the Zombie Cores as he was not a body cultivator, but he knew their value. Besides that, Botlam Dew attracted his attention and he directly bought ten bottles. He also bought seven Golden keys and a Saturn cake. With that he was quite satisfied.

"Would you happen to have any water affinity cultivation techniques?" he asked Gerard. The fact that they were not shown in the Gift shop did not mean they weren't available, however he was destined to be disappointed.

"Unfortunately, at the moment we do not have any. Perhaps I can forward your request to the Innkeeper the next time he returns."

"No, no need to trouble the Innkeeper," Will said cheerily. He would have been happy if he could find a cultivation technique here - he expected it to be better than whatever he could find on Earth - yet he was not disappointed by the lack of one. It would not be troublesome for him to find one on his own.

Once he was done seeing everything, Will retired to Hugo's room where he set the cake and invited the bodyguard to have some as well. The two ate in silence. For Hugo, it was simply a delicious cake, but as Will had dropped his cultivation and was no longer even in Qi Training, he lost himself in euphoria. It was not a physical sensation, as if it was like a drug giving him pleasure, but it brought his mental state to a peak, and slowly he went through all his pleasant memories. At some point, the man dozed off and took a short nap. He woke up completely refreshed and feeling good.

"Hugo return back to Earth and summon all my children. Tell them they need to be physically present when I return. Also, summon Hera as well. It is time I let her know the worth of her gamble. Also, contact Bluebird. I want to view their collection of cultivation techniques, but also tell my Butler to invite a few private dealers so that I can have a wider pool to choose from."

"What will you do?"

"Me? I'm very curious about the Mystery trial. Gerard said that there is a reward if I'm able to pass. Since my first visit is free, and it's not dangerous, I see no reason why I can't visit it."

Hugo nodded, and left the Inn. This time, he didn't get a Golden key since he himself didn't actually purchase anything or avail any services.

Once Hugo left, Will walked towards the trial. A large metal door awaited him, giving off an ancient feel. It was as if the door had existed since the beginning of time, and had trapped behind it an ancient power. As if the door knew his intention, it slowly opened, revealing a dark hall behind it.

Will mustered up his courage and stepped through, and was taken aback by the sudden change. The moment he stepped through the threshold of the door, his environment changed. He found himself dressed formally, surrounded by various dignitaries and noblemen at a ball. He did not recognize anyone there, and yet he knew everyone. To be clear, he had never met anyone here before in his life, but somehow he knew the name and details of everyone here. He also found that he knew that he was not here as William Benthon, but under the guise of another strange identity. The ball was being hosted by the King of whichever country this was, and everyone was speculating as to the reason for the ball. Somehow, Will knew that his trial was to befriend as many people as possible, and learn the truth of what was happening behind the scenes.

This was a strange trial, and completely different from what Will had been expecting. Yet on some level, it made sense. If Will had to define his strongest ability, he would say that it was networking. Despite his feeble cultivation and illness, he boasted a large financial empire and strong contacts in both the mortal and cultivation world. He knew how to win hearts, and how to influence people when he wanted something.

Since Will knew the details of his trial he saw no reason to delay. He approached a middle aged old man who was sporting a rather handsome handlebar mustache, and said, "Bernie! It's good to see you here! I was rather worried you wouldn't be able to make it due to the whole smuggler business." The man Bernie recognized Will, and laughed as he reached out for a hug. Will thought everything was going well, until he saw a red colored '+1' appearing above Bernie's head. When Will focused on it, he learnt that Will had negatively impacted Bernie's mood by reminding him of something unpleasant.

Although the middle aged man didn't let it show, he did not appreciate Will's comment. A smuggling ring had been caught by the local authorities in the area under his charge, and was now under investigation to see if he had any connections to the smuggling ring. While such a small incident would not affect their relationship, nurturing positive feelings was the most basic rule of networking. It seems Will had made a very basic mistake.

Will continued to talk to the man, and realized that his attention would somehow be naturally attracted to small gestures the man made, or minor details about his behavior. When he associated those gestures or behaviors with the blue numbers that would represent positive feelings or red that would represent negative, Will found himself learning a bit about how to anticipate the others reaction. Soon, he found himself experimenting with the others as well as he tried to charm them. He was already good at socializing and grasping at people's hearts, but now he found his skill improving. Soon, he forgot all about the purpose of his trial, and was more absorbed in improving his networking and reading people as much as possible.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 75: Getting serious

As soon as Lex woke up his mind was clear, without the usual grogginess that comes after a long nap. He noticed that he was not in his bathtub, the last place he remembered being. He was in the familiar white room.

A grin painted his face when he realized what had happened and jumped off the table, ready to test out his increased strength. The focus of the second procedure was his spirit, but naturally an increase in his cultivation realm would also increase his basic physical capabilities. He felt stronger, but he would need to test out his strength in the Training room to get a clear understanding of how much stronger he really was. The change that felt most obvious to him was his mind. He could not say that he had gotten smarter, but that he could do more. An easy way to explain it was that if Lex had to do a math equation mentally that would take him five seconds to solve, he could now solve it one. His mental capability had improved, but if Lex did not know how to solve that math equation in the first place no amount of improvements would change that. Although, perhaps he'd be able to learn how to solve the equation with greater ease now. He should test out the theory by going over some of his old college material. Since he'd forgotten almost all of it, it could be treated as if he was learning that stuff for the first time. It would give him a decent benchmark to test how much his learning capability had improved.

Naturally, there was more to his improvements than just that. With an increase in his spirit, he would be more resistant to spirit attacks or invasions, and would more easily be able to see through illusions. It would take time and experimentation to learn exactly what else his increased spirit allowed him to do.

"Congratulations," said Mary, appearing before him. Something that surprised Lex was that Mary had changed her clothes, and now appeared to be wearing the white Taekwondo uniform.

"Thank you, I'm relieved that the upgrade happened. I don't know how much longer I could have taken getting beaten up by those dummies."

"Haha your training is far from over young man. After your latest increase in cultivation, your spirit is unstable. Before you can increase your cultivation again, you need to wait for your spirit to stabilize. You can speed up that process by meditating, so that'll be your next task. For some people, that's even worse than getting beaten up by a dummy."

Lex groaned, thinking about that. He had never tried meditating before, but he couldn't imagine it would be easy. He checked how much his next upgrade would be, and predictably the price had increased to 10,000MP! He needed to figure out a way to increase his income.

"Mary, how can I increase the number of guests that I receive? My income is too low, it can't keep up with my expenses."

"If you want to increase your income, your focus should be on completing quests. You haven't even started the farming quest yet, let alone the one for repeat guests. Completing quests will directly help you improve the Inn and increase your authority. The greater your authority, the more things you can do."

Lex cursed, he had completely forgotten about getting the seeds! He would return to Earth as soon as possible to figure that out. But the other quest...

"But how am I supposed to get repeat guests? The only thing I can do there is wait for them to come back."

"That's too passive. Yes, some guests will eventually come back, ultimately fulfilling the requirements for the quest, but if that's all it took then why would the Inn give you the quest. You have to be more active, and figure out how to bring those customers back. You always wait for the system or the Inn to give you things, but never take initiative to figure things out on your own."

"The Marlo quest was the only one you put any effort into at all. Be more imaginative. To be honest, this quest was so, SO easy. I don't want to give you any bad ideas, but all you needed to do was find some poor sap on Earth, give them keys and make them come back to the Inn repeatedly. In fact, you earned

a decent amount of money, you could have even paid them directly to buy things from the Inn to complete the quest."

Lex frowned, realizing that he really had been too nonchalant about the quests. Mary was right, his quest that he had been treating as difficult had such an easy loophole. He pulled up his status to look at his ongoing quests.

Quests:

Having a guest come once can be an accident, only repeat guests can reflect an institution's prestige!
Have 5 individual repeat guests! (Progress: 1/5 (Repeated guest: Hugo))

Host has encountered a planet extremely suitable for finding guests. Build a connection to Dunya!

With a garden available in your backyard, it's time to improve the quality of your food. Grow spiritual vegetables for the Inns kitchen.

He was happy to see that Hugo returning counted him as a repeat guest. He was expecting Alexander to return soon, and those two teenage love birds definitely planned on using this place as a rendezvous but it was unknown when exactly they would return. He could wait a little to see if he had any repeat guests, but at the moment he was inclined towards using the loophole Mary told him of. Of course, he had to carefully plan out how to do it so that he would not be connected to the Inn. He was already surprised at the extent of surveillance he had encountered on Earth.

As for going to Dunya, forget it! The two planets he had gone to were only 1 star and yet he had nearly died on both of them. There was no way in hell he would be going to Dunya right now, even his brain tumor did not make him stupid enough to do something like that.

The easiest one for now was the vegetable one. He would complete it as soon as possible.

"By the way, while you were asleep Will recovered and has entered the Mystery trail. He has been in there for about an hour now."

"Oh interesting. Is there any way we can see what his trial is?"

"No, but you can ask him about it when he's done. I think it might not be a bad idea for you to go through the trial once as well."

"I'll think about it, but not now. I'm returning to Earth to buy some seeds, keep me updated in case he leaves the trial."

Lex exited the white room and returned directly to Earth. He took out his phone and turned it on, only to receive a dozen or so notifications. He directly ignored most of them, responding only to Moon and Larry. He told his youngest sister by telling her he'd be going on a trip for work so he'd be outside the service area so if she is unable to reach him she should not be alarmed. He messaged Larry thanking him for calling Bluebird, and then messaged him that he dropped out of Marlo's class and that he'd be leaving for a while.

He googled the closest Farmers Market and went there directly and bought a few packets of every kind of seed they had. Then he put up an ad on eBay for four people to help him make a special delivery. He only listed the payment for the ad as \$50 per person. He wanted to attract the kind of people who would not ask too many questions and were desperate for cash. He would check the response on the ad tomorrow, and promptly returned to the Inn. Of course, before returning to the Inn he went to a discreet location without any cameras. He didn't want to leave behind any evidence of him appearing and disappearing - especially since he was walking around without his Bluebird token. He didn't want his location being tracked.

He returned to the Inn and teleported directly to the greenhouse. The Gardener had done some decent work, and prepared some support beams for the vines to grow on. He'd divided the area into four different sections, one for vines, one for precious herbs, one for trees and one for the vegetables that Lex would bring. So far the growth was not too prominent, but it had barely been a day. It would take some time at least for the cuttings to regain their vigor.

Lex handed over the seeds and was about to discuss the growth plan with the gardener when Velma appeared beside him, telling him that Helen was asking for him. Apparently she had an important request.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 76: Morrison family

Lex walked to the young lady who always seemed to be surrounded by animals. Currently Helen had a rabbit in her lap, a pigeon on her shoulder and several peacocks surrounding her. Her affinity with animals was remarkably high.

"I see you are enjoying the company of our new residents," Lex said with a smile. "I was told you had a request, what may I do for you?"

Helen, who was sitting on the grass, looked up at the mysterious Innkeeper. Although her mood had been down lately, the Innkeeper somehow always had a warm and welcoming feeling around him. Just his presence was so relaxing. 'He would make a good body pillow,' she thought to herself, before turning her attention to the matter at hand.

"It's an unusual request, I hope you don't mind," she warned hesitantly.

"Not at all. Please, let me know what's on your mind and I'll see what I can do about it."

"I noticed one of your new guests earlier, and recognized him - William Bentham, CEO of Bentham corp. I'm sure there is no reason he would recognize me, but I was worried that you may have other guests who might recognize me in the future, which might cause some problems. Is there any way for you to hide my identity? If not, can you give me a mask? I don't want to spend my time hiding in my room."

This was an unusual request, but made Lex realize that this was another aspect of the Inn he had not anticipated. In the future, guests may come to the Inn to hide from their enemies in which case it would be important to hide their identities. Something like wearing a mask would not fool everyone since not everyone could have the 'Clark Kent effect', he needed a better solution.

"I suggest you tell her to wait a bit. Once you unlock the Inn prestige for guests, hiding their identities will naturally be a perk for them," said Mary, who was still dressed in her Taekwondo uniform.

"Your uniform looks nice," he commented mentally, before looking towards Helen and saying, "I am working on something for that. It should be available for you by tomorrow. Until then I can ask Velma to bring you a mask, or you can rest in your room."

"Thank you," Helen responded.

After that Lex teleported to his room and looked at his system. Only a few days were left till the end of his contract with Velma and Gerard. He wanted to wait as long as he could before he changed their status to permanent, but at this point he guessed it would be better to just change it lest he miss the deadline by accident. Paying a hefty 4000 MP, Lex changed their status to permanent, leaving him with only 3316MP. He was once again feeling poor.

The Innkeeper let out a sigh before he sat cross legged on his bed and started trying to meditate. He had never done it before and had no idea how to successfully meditate, and to be honest didn't really want to try either. But he still had to do it. He wanted to upgrade his cultivation as quickly as possible, and with his life on the line he had to be a little more disciplined.

While Lex was learning the art of meditation, Will finally exited the trial. It was fair to say he had failed spectacularly. Till the end of the trial he did not learn anything about the true purpose behind the ball at all. He did however learn a lot about the different ways in which people behave. When up against an ordinary man, it was easy to read what he was thinking or feeling simply from his facial expressions and body language. Against the cream of the crop of an entire nation, however, it was much harder. They had a mastery over their body and expressions, and only showed what they wanted the other to see.

They could be smiling and laughing, but cursing you on the inside and you would never know. In fact, Will encountered a particular lady who took up most of his time in the trial. He was ashamed to admit that he had ended up spending a good amount of time flirting with the woman. The interesting thing was, when confronted or even insulted, the woman's impression of Will increased. Of course, not all insults improved her impression, and some just plain made her mad. But within a certain boundary the more aggressive Will was the more she appreciated him internally, but externally no one could tell. He also met a rather interesting fellow who, without letting Will realize, got Will to disclose a few of his own secrets - or rather the secrets of the character he was playing. When Will realized what was happening he was quite shook. It then dawned on him that while he was trying to gauge others, others were doing the same to him - perhaps with even a greater mastery than himself. It was an important lesson.

All in all, even though Will failed the trial, he found the experience very insightful. He would take some time to digest everything he had learnt and then return. With that done, he left for Earth. He was about to be a very busy man once again, and he could feel the excitement coursing through his veins.

Alexander got off a space shuttle and onto the Red planet. He did not need a space suit as the atmosphere on Mars had been completely altered using arrays and technology to make it suitable for human habitation. His travel time from Earth to Mars was one of the quickest ever recorded, one because the two planets happened to be near each other in their orbit, and two because he had used hundreds of spirit stones to speed up his flight. He was normally not impatient, but this matter was important.

"Alexander, welcome home," said a well dressed man who approached him with a smile. His name was Percy, and was one of Alexander's personal assistants. "News about you is still suppressed so this is the only welcoming committee for you this time around, I'm afraid."

"It doesn't matter. Take me home directly, I need to meet with my father."

"Of course," replied Percy, and led him to his car.

Alexander was silent all the way home, something unusual Percy thought, but then this was an unusual time. Percy of course did not know that Alexander had anticipated the assassination attempt, so he thought the young man was in a bad mood because of it.

His home was surprisingly not a large mansion, but was a small, single story building surrounded by a vast forest. The Morrison family home was a very private building, and they almost never received guests. Other than a few, very old and trustworthy staff members, everyone in the building was a Morrison.

The first thing Alexander did when he got home was meet his mother, to assure her that he was unhurt from the recent incident, before quickly entering his father's study room. Two young men who bore a strong resemblance to Alexander were sitting in the room chatting when he arrived. If anyone saw the three of them together they would assume they were brothers, but no they were son, father and grandfather. Alexander's father and grandfather both had a very high cultivation level, which drastically slowed down their aging process.

"Ah my dear Alexander, you've grown so much since I last saw you. Give your grandfather a hug." Alexander quickly and unceremoniously rejected his grandfather. Who the hell was he kidding? His grandfather was at the peak of Golden Core in body cultivation, the last time Alexander hugged him he broke a few ribs.

"I see you've gotten a new tattoo," Alexander said, looking at the crow on his grandfather's neck. Unlike the other two, Alexander's grandfather was covered in tattoos from head to toe. They came in every shape and size you could imagine. Alexander remembered that once when he was very young he played a game of tictactoe with his grandfather on one of his biceps using an ink gun. The evidence of that game was still there.

"Don't encourage him," said Rorick, Alexander's father. "Your grandmother has introduced the old man to anime. You don't know how much effort it took me to stop him from getting a ninjutsu tattooed on himself. Unfortunately, I was not able to stop him from altering some of the family spirit techniques."

Alexander's grandfather, Brandon, grinned and activated a technique to show him when Rorick was referring to. Alexander immediately dismissed the chain made of fire that appeared in Brandon's hand, his focus was on the golden, glowing aura around his grandfather as well as his suddenly spiked hair. He was both impressed and embarrassed.

Alexander shook his head in defeat and quickly took out the Tier 4 Zombie core and threw it towards his grandfather. He knew that unless he intervened, the two would keep antagonizing each other. His grandparents were both very free spirited people. They wore their hearts on their sleeve, weren't afraid to show exactly how they felt and did exactly what they wanted. His parents were the exact opposite - they were extremely formal and disciplined, and paid great attention to propriety. Other than when they talked about cultivation, they never got along with each other - mostly because it was his grandfather's passion to irritate his father.

When Brandon held the zombie core his casual smile completely disappeared, and he looked at the item in his hand with doubtful eyes.

"I think you should listen to what happened on Earth. This will affect all our plans."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 77: Harry Styles

"Wait, so you've launched a hunt for Marlo?" asked Alexander.

"Yes, when you told us to look at Marlo's recent actions we noticed that he disappeared shortly before the assassination. We did not suspect his involvement at all until then, it's a good thing you tipped us off. We haven't started looking for him directly, but we've already hinted to a few organizations on Earth

that we want to know his whereabouts. They've already begun their hunt, it won't be long before we find him."

"No no no! He was not involved at all, that's not why I told you to look for him. I already know where he is, I wanted to know about his recent actions because I wanted to know who could hurt him so badly. This is what happened..." Alexander began explaining to his family where he saw Marlo, unaware that his casual remark had inadvertently caused the mysterious Innkeeper to move out of his apartment and escape Earth.

The next day Lex woke up, unrested and groggy. He was not in his room, but in the meditation room instead. Yesterday he had tried meditating, but found he could not stop himself from having random thoughts. After trying to avoid daydreaming for thirty minutes, he had accidentally fallen asleep. When he woke up Mary told him that mediating would be harder for him than others because his spirit was currently unstable, but that was exactly why it was so important that he keep trying.

After another short period with no success, it occurred to him to try the meditation room. The change was drastic, and he immediately felt much calmer once inside. Lex was not sure exactly what state constituted as meditation, as he never fully went without a few random thoughts crossing his mind, but he had a firmer grasp on his thoughts at least. Still, it got boring pretty quickly. However the young Innkeeper persevered.

At some point he had once again fallen asleep without realizing, and was only waking up now. He got up and stretched, cracking his various joints as he stood up. Sleeping whilst in a sitting pose was not comfortable at all, even with his improved physique.

He had breakfast in his room and then teleported back to Earth. It was time to complete his quest. He made his way to the particular coffeeshop he had requested as the meeting location on his eBay ad. After exchanging various messages with the people who contacted him and waiting for a few hours, he finally selected four men to help him complete his task. Three of them were older, and wore old, worn out clothes. The fourth looked like a teenager, and though he was also wearing old clothes looked very presentable.

"Your task is simple, and should not take more than twenty minutes. I'm shooting a film and you'll be helping me during a scene. You'll all wear blindfolds, and I will lead you somewhere. I'll give you all a check which you will have to hand over to someone in exchange for a bottle of 'Botlam Dew'. Once

you've received the bottle I'll bring you back. We may shoot the scene a couple of times. Once I'm satisfied with the result, I'll pay you all in cash."

The four men didn't seem too bothered by his instructions and were just impatient to get started. Lex led them to a secluded area in Central Park and handed them all blindfolds and handed them signed blank checks, as well as a Golden Key each once they were wearing the blindfolds.

"Action," Lex yelled loudly while pretending to record them from his phone. He helped them activate the keys, and they were all teleported to the Inn. Lex used his control over the Inn to teleport them directly to the Gift shop, he didn't want anyone to see what was happening

Velma greeted them all, and one by one they handed over the check and asked for a bottle of Botam Dew. Once they all had their bottles, he ejected them from the Inn.

When they all returned they all received a Golden key each, for buying something from the Inn. This way Lex didn't need to buy them for them himself again, which was a hefty cost. The base price for a Golden key was 100MP, but every time he bought the key again during the same week the price would double. This double price wouldn't count if a guest would buy a key themselves from the Gift shop, but for Lex buying these 4 keys had already cost him 1500MP! Fortunately, even though the checks these four people used to buy the Botlam Dew were from Lex's own account, the System did not discriminate and accepted the MP so he recovered 480MP.

With one successful transaction he told them they were going to shoot one more time and quickly repeated the process. As soon as the four returned back to Earth, he got the notification for Quest Completion.

Quest Complete! The Host's rewarded is being calculated:

- No upgrade applied

Reward Rank: D

Reward: Midnight Inn Prestige

Remarks: If you put in all your effort, work hard, and focus with all your might, somehow you might succeed at being even lazier than you are.

New Quest: Hire a permanent Employee

Quest details: Due to the system's serious doubt in the Host, no restrictions are being placed on the kind of employee. Please hire anyone who will not somehow harm the Inn, and you will be rewarded accordingly.

Quest reward: Subject to change based on performance.

Lex's lips twitched once again at the heavy criticism, but he had come to expect it now. Why was the system so much more annoying than Mary? She was so cute and adorable, the system should be more like her.

At least with that out of the way, Lex turned his attention to his 'actors'. He quickly took back the blindfolds, keys and Botlam Dews as the 'props' he had given them and paid them all \$50. Some of them tried to argue for more, ready with the intention to create trouble, but Lex was a cultivator now. As soon as he frowned, his intimidating figure promptly shut them up.

The last 'actor', the teenager, didn't leave immediately after receiving his money. He kept staring at Lex for a bit, and just as Lex was ready to brush off any attempts for more money, the kid said, "Your haircut doesn't suit your face."

"Huh?" Lex said, not expecting such a remark.

"When you get your haircut and the hair is freshly cut, it may not look so bad, but once a few days pass and your hair becomes more natural the look changes. Your current haircut makes your face look round, and bigger than it is. You should try out a different style. If you want, I can cut your hair."

Lex smiled, amused at the boys' attempted hustle.

"And how much will you charge for the haircut?" he asked, not dismissing the kid immediately.

"The first time is free. If you like the haircut, and decide in the future that you want me to continue cutting your hair, you can give me a call. You should also get a shave too while you're at it, by the way. I can tell you shave using a trimmer instead of a blade. That causes your hair to be cut unevenly and doesn't give you a clean look. A close shave will improve your look and make you more presentable. I perform hot towel shaves, which will not only help you relax, it'll completely change the way you feel about shaving."

Originally Lex wanted to leave immediately as he was in a hurry to see what the prestige system did. However the prestige system had been unlocked and implemented, so whether he learnt about it immediately or a little later did not matter.

"What's your name kid?" Lex asked.

"Harry, just Harry. I used to go by Harry Styles when I started cutting hair, but I just found out that there's already some guy who goes by that name, so until I think of a better one I just go by Harry."

"Alright Harry, I could go for a haircut. Where are we doing this, right here?"

"No, I don't have my equipment with me. You'll have to follow me to my apartment, I either do house calls or do my grooming at my apartment."

Lex didn't mind, and he liked Harry's enterprising attitude so he followed him back to his apartment. Harry lived in Harlem so they had to take the subway but it did not take too long. Lex walked into the small studio to find a messy but cozy place. In the corner Harry had set a barbers chair in front of a full sized mirror. Although the place was small, it did not look like something a broke teenager should be able to afford on his own.

"This is your apartment alone?" he asked, curious if he shared the place with someone.

"Pretty much," he said, gathering his supplies.

"How do you afford the rent?"

"I cut hair for the whole building," Harry replied casually. "And some of the neighboring buildings as well. Don't underestimate my skill, trust me, you'll look like a whole other person once I'm done with you. Now, have a seat."

He dusted the chair and welcomed Lex to sit down as he filled his spray bottle with water. Lex sat, impressed by the child. Now all that was left to see how good he actually was.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 78: Rose Soceity

Harry wrapped Lex in the Barbers cape and sprayed his hair with cool water.

"Before I begin I just want to be sure, you're okay with me styling it as I want, right?"

"Yeah no problem."

Harry nodded and as soon as he began his expression abruptly changed. Lex was staring at the kid in the mirror and saw his focused and serious look as he combed Lex's hair into various styles. Once he decided what he wanted to go with, he started snipping.

The teenager was snipping at an even pace, as if he knew exactly how many times he needed to cut in one area and by how much. With his comb in his hand he would measure Lex's hair length and then cut it as was required.

After a while Lex stopped paying attention to Harry and just relaxed. For some reason Lex always found the process of getting a haircut very relaxing. The gentle combing, the snipping sound of the scissors, the occasional cool spray of water, all soothed him. Without realizing it, Lex closed his eyes and slowly started meditating. His thoughts didn't wander towards the Inn, or his guests, or his cultivation. He was simply existing. The sound of the cutting and the feeling of Harry moving around him kept him from falling asleep, but the gentle rhythm relaxed him.

Time passed and eventually Harry finished grooming Lex's hair, but Lex himself was completely unaware and he was already meditating deeply. Harry noticed Lex's peculiar state, but did nothing as he had

many customers who had inadvertently fallen asleep while he worked. He took it as a compliment, and was proud of his skills that would allow his customers to enjoy so much.

Harry gently took Lex's head and had him rest it backwards on the neck rest to get him ready for the shave. At some point earlier he had placed a face towel under hot running water which he now grabbed using tongs. He placed the towel of his forearm once first, to ensure the temperature was not too hot, then gently placed the towel over Lex's cheeks and neck. The warm, wet towel heated up Lex's face and opened up his pores. The sudden high temperature almost woke Lex from his meditation, but Harry quickly started massaging Lex behind the ears which helped calm him down.

After a short while he stopped the massage and prepared the lather, before removing the towel and applying it to Lex's face. Once that was done Harry took out a fresh blade and started to shave Lex. The shave itself did not take too long and once it was done Harry took out another face towel that he had placed in an icebox and put it on Lex's face like he did previously. This time the cold woke Lex up from his meditation, but the man discovered that he was feeling extremely refreshed. He felt even better than after waking up from a short nap, and was genuinely amazed at the experience. He had never gotten someone else to shave him before, but now he could say that the experience wasn't bad.

Removing the towel Harry messed up Lex's hair once with his hand, before using a blowdryer on it. Afterwards he quickly styled it and then retrieved a mirror to show Lex his hair from the back. Lex was surprised by how much he liked the new hair style and enjoyed the experience. He decided right there and then, he MUST hire Harry for his Inn. He was sure his guests would enjoy the experience, and even if they didn't he definitely would.

"You're better than I was expecting," Lex said as he took out another \$50 from his wallet. "I'm impressed."

"I said for the first time there's no charge," Harry said, as if very disciplined. Although Lex tried to say it was a tip, the young man was proud and refused to submit. For some reason, that made Lex like him even more. They exchanged contact information so Lex could contact him in the future, but Harry was unaware that Lex was planning on seeing him much sooner than he anticipated.

Lex exited the building and returned to the Inn from somewhere nearby. He would wait a few hours before secretly sending Harry a platinum key to recruit him so that he does not associate Lex with the Inn.

Back at the Inn he teleported directly to his room and investigated what prestige did.

Prestige:

Gives guests different levels of perks based on how much MP they spend at the Inn.

Perks at Prestige level 1:

Can receive glasses equipped with Clark Kent effect (only work while at the Inn)

Perks at Prestige level 2:

Can instantly teleport to the Inn from anywhere in the universe once (great for escaping enemies)

Perks at Prestige level 3:

Can travel to a world connected to the Inn

Raise host authority for higher prestige classes.

All guests who arrived at the Inn would automatically reach Prestige level 1, but to reach level 2 they would need to spend 10,000MP and then 100,000MP for level 3! Since the prestige system was just unlocked it only just started counting the MP expenditure, and did not count any MP anyone had spent prior to this.

Lex was quite happy with this as it gave his guests an incentive to spend more while at his Inn. With nothing else to do now Lex really wanted to just relax and game for a bit, but for now he could not let himself relax. Once his cultivation was raised he could afford to take a few more breaks. He promptly returned to the meditation room and spent the next few hours both succeeding and failing at meditation. Once it had been long enough he teleported back to Earth, ready to send Harry the platinum key.

Something interesting he learnt was that he did not need to wait for people to use his keys, as long as they were holding them Lex could remotely activate them. This way he would not need to wait for Harry for a few hours or days or weeks like he did with Marlo.

How would he reach Harry's apartment? Of course, the easy way. It was already night so after making sure no one was in the area Lex equipped Icarus' wings and quickly flew to Harry's apartment window and snuck in. He had made sure to secretly unlock the window while he was at Harry's apartment.

The teenager was asleep at his desk, on his laptop in front of him a video about styling hair was playing. Lex nodded in appreciation at the dedication and dropped the platinum key in the kid's hand before sneaking back out. As much as Lex felt the urge to fly around the city, he knew he would get into trouble so he resisted. As soon as he returned to the Inn he mentally activated the platinum key and was once again teleported to the familiar white room.

Soon Harry appeared in the room as well, still in a half asleep state. Drool was dripping down his chin and though he was standing, it looked like he himself was unaware that he was awake now.

Lex viewed his status to check for any unexpected information before he began.

Name: Harry

Age: 17

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details:

- None

Species: Human

Remarks: Seems extremely ordinary, so already better than the host!

Once he was sure all was as it seemed, he was ready for his performance.

"Welcome, young Harry, to the Midnight Inn," a booming voice shook the poor teenager awake from his reverie. The teenager was alarmed when he realized he was in an unfamiliar place, but before his thoughts could stray further away, his attention was attracted to the man standing in the middle.

"I am the Innkeeper, and I have summoned you here because I've had an eye on your talent. The universe is a vast place, it would be a shame if your skills would be left unearthed..." Lex was using the full might of the Host Attire on the young man so that he could make a strong impression on him. He did not want to lose another potentially great employee due to carelessness.

Hera was still dazed as she stood beside Will, who was welcoming a few guests to his house. Yesterday when she saw him looking so young and energetic she did not recognize him at all. The old man looked as if he had never been sick a day in his life, and as if he were the model for good health. Just as Hera was dealing with the shock of his recovery, the old man introduced her to the world of cultivation. He told her the repayment that he had promised her that was worth much more than money was cultivation, for her and when he came of age, for her son.

Since then she had seen countless amazing things, and the old man had already gotten an instructor for her and her son. She had started training her body today, but since she was not too athletic and completely out of shape it was very tough for her. Yet the old man promised that soon, he would help her overcome that barrier.

Once the last of the guests entered the room the doors were firmly closed and Will's bodyguard, Hugo, stood at the door.

"Welcome back ladies and gentlemen, to the Rose Society, where we left off so many unfinished things long ago. I have found for us the path to salvation and redemption."

With a wide grin Will took out seven shining, golden keys from a pouch and started passing them around.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 79: Glamor Sorceror

Harry was in awe of the man before him, and all the amazing things he told him. Cultivation? Multiple worlds? The whole universe? These things were too vast and vague for him to comprehend - but the one thing he did understand was that this was an amazing opportunity for him. Harry had a hustling attitude. Every minute of every day his mind was either on how to make money or how to improve his skills and make connections.

Truth be told the apartment he was living in wasn't under his name, even though he paid the rent. Harry was an orphan and at the age of fifteen he ran away from his foster home and came to New York. It took him some time, but eventually he worked his way into a decent life. His apartment was under the name of a rich student Harry met at an event at NYU. He liked Harry's skills, and had him cut his hair every two weeks. He even did all the paperwork to help Harry get the apartment, though he was very clear about the fact that Harry would have to pay the deposit and rent himself.

He was able to achieve all of this because he availed every opportunity that came his way, and he wasn't about to miss this one either. But before he could officially become a member of the Midnight Inn, he had to undergo a test. And what were the details of the test? He had to completely restyle some girl named Velma's hair. Harry was a little nervous as he usually cut men's hair, but he had seen a lot of tutorials online on cutting womens hair.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, suppressing his nerves. When he opened his eyes again they were filled with focus and determination. He would not fail.

Lex watched as Harry worked. He only set the test that he wanted to have Harry cut some hair. The system decided that the test would be cutting Velma's hair, but just the haircut wasn't enough. It would test various things, such as professionalism, knowledge, skill, Velma's satisfaction, her charm factor - whatever that was - and many more. To be honest, he wanted to use some loopholes and just hire him directly, but the system would never relax its standards for anyone - even its host.

The equipment was provided by the Inn, and the haircut took place in the white room. When Harry asked what kind of a look Velma wanted, she said that as she dealt with guests a lot a formal look is what she wanted. Other than that she did not have much in mind, as this was literally the first makeover of her very short life and she knew nothing about them!

As Harry worked everyone waited, filled with anticipation.

Brother Chen and Blane had been through a lot the last couple of days. When they reached the 'reclamation outpost' they were shocked to see that this simple 'outpost' was already bigger than any settlement they had ever seen. They were led to the registration and background check department, where they were questioned by Golden Core cultivators about their past in general such as if they had any affiliations with other settlements, if they acted against any settlements and what kind of crimes they had committed. They were hooked up to lie detectors so they could only tell the truth. Fortunately, although the two had killed humans before it was mostly against bandits and they never attacked settlements for resources or committed heinous crimes.

Once their background check was completed and they were approved for registration, they were sent to a rehabilitation and reeducation center. The purpose of the rehabilitation and reeducation center was to diagnose what mental health issues they had, what disorders they had developed, and determine if they were suitable to join society. The Jotun Empire took it as a foregone conclusion that living their entire lives in survival mode, attacked at every opportunity all natives of Vegus Minima would have some mental health issues and disorders. Not that they would be discriminated against for having disorders, they would receive the appropriate help.

Once they were diagnosed, they eventually learnt why all this was happening. The Jotun Empire was not an empire founded by anyone on Vegus Minima, but was a galactic empire that had many solar systems under their domain. They were in a massive war against demons that spanned the entire known universe. It wasn't just the Jotun Empire that was at war against them, but various other Empires, Sects, Families, Organizations and powers.

The war was a complex issue and the two did not get too many details about it, but they were assured that as recognized citizens of the Jotun Empire they would be protected and no longer needed to fight - unless they wanted to!

The two could not believe it, and were in shock. They didn't know what their lives would look like now that they had a chance to live peacefully. Before they could wrap their heads around it, they decided to look for their lost caravan. It must be said that the people at the reclamation outpost were extremely organized. As soon as the two provided information about their caravan, they were informed about their whereabouts. The caravan had actually split up once they reached the outpost. The Jotun Empire offered them homes, security and jobs as well as professional training as to how to fit into a peaceful society and live meaningful lives. More than half the caravan took that offer and were relocated off

planet. Among these people was Iris, Blane's girlfriend. Others, who had a strong hatred for zombies which were identified as lesser demons, joined the war efforts. Lily, Brother Chen's sister, was among those people.

The two soldiers looked at each other with mixed feelings as they knew that soon they would have to split up. For now however, they decided to go find Lily as she was nearby. She no doubt thought that Brother Chen was dead, and they had to let her know they were alive, as well as about the Inn. Even with the Jotun Empire bringing change to Vegus Minima, it was true that the Midnight Inn would be the best way to raise their strength.

The Rose Society was an organization Will and his High School friends had formed. It was meant to signify that they looked harmless like a beautiful rose, but their thorns could cut if you try to pluck them. It represented a fanciful dream, but to them it was their lives work. The cultivation resources of Earth were limited, that much was evident, but how exactly were they limited?

The actual fact of the matter was, there was an abundance of cultivation materials for cultivators at the Foundation realm and below. However, the real scarcity was for Golden Core cultivators. In fact, most of them never make any progress after entering the Golden Core realm at all. Yet because the world was controlled by these cultivators, a resource shortage was artificially created so that fewer people would ever even reach the Golden Core realm.

The Rose Society was supposed to be a secret organization that worked behind the scenes to slowly take control of the resources from the few. Even though Golden Core cultivators were the strongest, it wasn't as if they could stay on their farms, mines and manufacturing plants all the time, or that they had a good or even adequate understanding of business. These things were managed by those at lower cultivations, so taking control of the flow of resources slowly but subtly was entirely possible. Yet the dream was cut short because the Society could not garner enough momentum and keep their activities secretive enough. Now however, Will wanted to restart the organization. The six other members as well as Hera looked at Will curiously, wondering what he wanted to do.

"Thank you for trusting me," Will said with a smile. "I know you all have questions. But this is not the place to answer them. To get your answers, we have to go to another place." Will smiled as he picked up the Golden key and activated it.

"If what you're saying is true," said Brandon with a rare, serious expression, "then this truly will change a lot of things. We should go investigate this Midnight Inn with you. I'll call your grandma over and we'll leave once she arrives."

Alexander and Rorick nodded and began waiting. Everyone in the room was filled with anticipation.

Somewhere in a forest in Nibiru, a giant turtle finally ended its daily tasks, and stopped to take a rest. Unexpectedly, in a rare occurrence, the Turtle actually fell asleep. It had recently experienced a breakthrough in its cultivation, so its control over its spirit energy was shaky, and in one of those moments where its spirit energy broke free of its control, it was attracted towards a Golden key it had placed in its shell, activating it.

"But mom, I was only playing!" cried RussianPrincess77, but her mother would have none of it.

"I've told you a million times, you're not allowed to touch the book of prophecies! Now hand over the key and go to your room!"

"Never!" the young girl exclaimed and started running and laughing.

"I told you to hand it over!" the mother roared as she took off her slipper in an experienced manner and threw it towards her fleeing daughter. Like a homing beacon it followed RussianPrincess77 until it gave her a solid whack on her bum. The girl fell over, accidentally releasing some spirit energy and activating the key.

Somewhere on a space shuttle near Vegus Minima, a lone man was meditating in a prison cell. His body was impaled with various chains that restricted the flow of spirit energy, yet the man did not seem to

mind. The pain in his body did not torment him, it only served to strengthen his will and solidify his focus.

Suddenly, a floating, golden door appeared in the cell in front of him, offering him freedom. The man did not even hesitate. Before anyone on the ship could realize what was happening, the door was gone and the prisoner along with it.

Lex was grinning as he read the notification.

Quest Complete! The Host's reward is being calculated:

- Reward upgraded for completing the quest in less than 24 hours
- Reward upgraded for locating employee with unique talent

Reward Rank: B-

Reward: Heritage for Glamor Sorcerer (given directly to employee), 1 barber shop, 1 employee residence, 1000MP, Event Manager panel

The little Innkeeper was too excited about his recent success, with no idea that he was about to welcome more guests than he'd ever had before!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 80: Eccentric guests

Lex tried to view the details for Glamor Sorcerer but unfortunately all he could see was that sorcery was a different school of power elevation (increasing one's strength) than cultivation. It would be too awkward if Lex, as the Innkeeper and his boss, had to ask Harry what it was, which is why he would have to investigate in some other way. He then looked at the Event manager panel, barber shop and employee residence. The newly unlocked panel allowed him to easily organize and manage events at the

Inn, whether they were hosted by himself or his guests. After all, even common fast food restaurants hosted birthdays, why couldn't the Inn? The organizing included setting up temporary venues that were much cheaper than establishing permanent buildings, hiring temporary staff, arranging prizes and many more features. The most important feature - to Lex at least - was the autorun, which entailed that if Lex was too busy to personally oversee an event the system could manage the event based on a set template.

As for the shop and residence, well the name was pretty clear on what they were and what function they performed. Since he had decided earlier that all his next expansions would be near one another, he placed the barber shop opposite the Training room. It was a quaint little shop with a large window that let you see inside. A small red, white and blue barber shop pole was spinning next to the door which Lex found amusing. Inside on the left there were a few sofas for people to sit, on the right there were three barber chairs placed in front of full size mirrors and in the far end of the shop was the till. Originally that was all there was to it, but Lex had an idea and placed the employee residence right on top of the barber shop, with an entrance directly from the back of the shop.

Technically, the employee residence was in a separate space and no one would enter it other than the employee, or anyone the employee invited in. However, Lex thought linking it to the shop and having it physically manifest here might not be a bad idea. It was just visualization, and he suspected Harry would like it. Though at the moment the residence was empty except for a bed - Harry would have to populate it with furniture himself using MP. Speaking of which, since Harry worked with guests directly Lex did not need to pay him. Instead, 40% of whatever Harry charged his clients would go to Harry and the rest would go to Lex.

"Welcome to your barber shop, Harry. What do you think?"

The young man stood frozen at the entrance. A building appearing out of thin air surprised him, but it was being told that this shop was his that froze him. He had tears in his eyes and his mind had stopped working. Even though he was doing well on Earth, he couldn't even get a job as a barber until he got a barbers license and now he had an entire store of his own.

Before Lex could tease the young man he realized some guests were about to enter the Inn so he left Harry to enjoy this moment on his own.

Lex appeared in front of the Inn just in time to see a young girl picking herself off the ground, rubbing her rear as if she had just been hit. Behind the girl stood a tall, mature lady who looked absolutely outraged. Lex noticed the two were wearing glasses with the 'Clark Kent' effect, which would work on everyone else in the Inn except him.

He looked at their statuses before saying anything.

Name: Kristine Joel

Age: 99

Sex: Female

Cultivation Details: Insufficient authority to view (cultivation sealed)

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Hello mama *whistling noise*

Name: Vera Joel

Age: 16

Sex: Feale

Cultivation Details:

- Foundation Initial

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: She has the aura of a new oracle, stay away! They are all scammers!

Lex raised an eyebrow. There were multiple things in their status that caught his eye, yet it would be rude to keep his guests waiting. However before he could say anything, the older lady waved her right hand, summoning what looked like a bathroom slipper.

"I told you to behave!" she roared as she threw the slipper, yet the young girl dodged effortlessly.

"What's so good about behaving? I told you we should have run away with dad, then we wouldn't be in this mess!"

"DON'T BRING YOUR NO GOOD FATHER INTO THIS!" she roared once as she began sprinting after her running daughter.

Lex stood there frozen, unsure of how to respond. The mother and daughter pair were actually running in circles around, yelling at each other.

Lex coughed loudly and used a bit of the power of the Host Attire to attract their attention.

"Welcome guests to the Midnight Inn," he said, smiling warily.

"Midnight? Such an ominous name," said the mother, who finally stopped.

"It's not ominous, it's romantic," replied the daughter confidently. "Innkeeper, I would like to travel to a different planet. Any planet with a Star Class civilization would do."

Lex instantly froze when he heard what the mother and child were saying. They seemed to be familiar with the concept of the Inn, but did not know the details.

"If you want to travel to another world, you would need to increase your Midnight Inn Level to 3. Currently, you are at level 1," he told Vera. "You can increase your prestige by spending a total of 100,000MP at the Inn."

"Please ignore her nonsense, Innkeeper. Her father has spoiled her silly," said the mother with an apologetic smile.

"Haha it's alright. I've heard oracle's are mischievous, it must be tough on you." As soon as Lex said that, both the mother and daughter froze. Clearly that was supposed to be a secret. Lex was curious about what an oracle was, he could venture a guess based on the name but it would be nice to know the details. Yet he couldn't ask directly so he thought he'd stir the pot a little by mentioning it, but it seemed to have a different effect.

The mother coughed as she straightened herself up and looked at the man in front of her as her daughter quickly stood behind her. She could not determine his cultivation, especially since hers was sealed, but based on what her daughter had read in the book of prophecies he was not a simple man.

She opened her mouth to say something but before she could utter a word a bright light flashed, and a giant sleeping turtle appeared in the middle of the road. The three of them looked at the turtle, unsure of how to react. Lex recognized it from the horn on its head and checked its status.

Name: Not available

Age: 2017

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Inner Core

Species: Galactic Sovereign turtle (infant)

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: It's a newborn baby, so get a babysitter!

Lex stared at its age for a bit, trying to digest what he was seeing. But then, this was the cultivation world. He should get used to it. He used his suit's powers to gently lift the turtle and place it in the shade of a tree.

"Please excuse the interruption, we receive all kinds of guests."

"Clearly," responded the mother, still looking at the turtle. "Please excuse our earlier display. It was quite rude of us."

"No no, not at all. Such a close family relationship is quite enviable. Would you like a tour of the Inn? You seem to be familiar with some of it already."

"Yes of course, that would be lovely."

Lex was about to take them on a tour himself when he felt more guests entering the Inn. This was quite a surprise, it was rare to have guests let alone so many at the same time.

"Gerard, why don't you show our guests around," he said, summoning the old man. Gerard quickly led the mother and daughter duo not to the manor that was right in front of them, but to the Golf cart nearby. It seemed he had discovered a passion.

Just as the two left, a bright light shone, after which Will appeared at the Inn along with Hugo - who still had a room rented - as well as seven other guests.

"Welcome to the Midnight Inn," the old man said excitedly to his guests, who were looking at their new surroundings in alarm.

"Will, you seem to have stolen my life," Lex said, approaching the crowd with a smile. Will was the first person who had brought so many guests to him at once, which drastically improved his impression of the old man.

"Haha my apologies Innkeeper, I was too excited," said the old man, grinning like a child with his favorite toy.

"In that case, would you also like to give the tour to your guests as well?"

"It would be my pleasure."

With that the man began leading his guests, as if he was extremely familiar with the place. Lex was amused at his expression and was about to return to the mother and daughter before he realized even more guests were on the way. What a busy day.