

Innkeeper 711

The Innkeeper

Chapter 711: Quest Complete!

An awkward peace returned to the isolated realm. The leaders were still spread out where they had been fighting the Kraven while the two deities stood in front of the tavern. While the leaders were mostly fine, feeling only embarrassed that the Kraven had come and gone and they could do naught but watch. They had not even been able to kill a single one, though admittedly it was unfair to ask anyone to kill an immortal in only a few moves.

But besides their ego, they suffered no hurt. The ones feeling the most awkward were the two deities. Although they had contributed by bringing the fight to the isolated realm, that was the end of their contribution. Normally that would be more than enough for them, as beings who lorded over the realm and had ultimate power. But Lex was not hiding his dissatisfaction at their lack of participation. To be clear, he had not said anything, but his expression while looking at them was enough.

Moreover, although there was no proof, anyone who even glanced at the situation could tell that the two of them were conversing with Belail in secret. Their purposes were hidden for now, but even if they truly were noble or for the greater good, what did that have to do with Lex? By making them aware of the situation he was already contributing massively, yet this was how he was being repaid. Strictly speaking, they did not owe him any help. But when one had such a ridiculously powerful elder, who cared about such trivialities.

"I, for one, did not share an invitation with the Kraven. I wonder how they learnt about this meeting," Lex mused out loud. He did not accuse anyone out right, but his glare was still pointed at the birds.

"Even if a secret is kept close, when such significant figures are involved in matters, unless special preparation has been taken to hide or masquerade the tides of fate, it is easy to divine something. They may not necessarily have known about the meeting, only that something significant is happening in this place."

Lex looked around and discovered that everything had happened very quickly. Barely a couple of minutes had passed by. Although the tavern had been attacked, the town itself remained wholly unhurt. The wedding could, theoretically, still continue. He had to wrap this up and ensure that the ceremonies were not interrupted for he really needed a good result for this quest.

"I am no longer in the mood for a long conversation. How are you planning on discovering the anomaly? Without learning what it is, there can be no remedy."

"Previously I estimated that the realm had a few decades of time, but due to the... strain the realm suffered while your elder arrived, that time has surely reduced, though I cannot say by how much. Taking our time with the matter is no longer advisable. I suggest that since we are already gathered, we take this opportunity to approach the branch head for Ventura Chaotic-Gold and ask him directly."

"Although Ventura is an overwhelmingly strong organization, they are not considered an evil one, or that would affect the number of students they receive. They will surely leave a way out for us."

Just as Lex was about to ask how the manager can be contacted, a new figure appeared within the isolated realm. Although Lex had never seen him before, he recognized the race as Bravenharbinger. He had seen one before - Dillion Jormander, someone who worked for the Henali and had accepted Ragnar's trillion MP quest. Although, admittedly, this one did look bigger and more intimidating.

"What could you possibly have to ask me?" the massive, gray creature asked, his double bladed weapon in his hand. The creature's deterrence was incredibly strong, and would have cowed everyone had they not just felt the even stronger aura of Lex's elder.

"There is something wrong with the realm," said Cornelius, his tone accusatory. Unlike the others, he was an actual member of Ventura so he was not concerned that he would be attacked. After all, if members of Ventura wanted to fight one another, there was a lot of paperwork that had to be submitted beforehand!

"The entire realm is deteriorating, and could be destroyed in a number of decades!"

"Oh, so you finally noticed," he said in a completely dismissive tone. He did not seem to think that such a matter deserved such concern.

"Well, all I can say about that is that you have been quite lax about the Kraven. You are completely ignoring them and letting them do as they want. Who can you blame but yourselves for not noticing how they are using treasures to feed on the laws of the realm? I told you long ago, when we first met, that the Kraven were one of the foremost races employed in inter-realm wars. Why did you think that was? Just because they are a little tough to kill?"

The creature scoffed.

"They have even used the laws of the realm as raw materials to build an inter-realm portal, connecting this realm to a much, much larger one! While they feed on the foundation of this realm, and artificially create Earth Immortals, they have already built themselves an escape route to leave for when they ultimately leave this realm barren and unable to support life."

Lex heard the sound of a notification, and had a sneaking suspicion his long awaited quest was finally complete. Unable to hold back his anticipation, he peeked at the notification.

New Notification: Quest Complete! Source of anomaly detected! System is making adjustments to avoid such anomalies in the future...

There was more, but Lex stopped reading for now. The quest was finally over! He could soon move to his own realm! The excitement of it nearly swept away his negative feelings. But he controlled himself and kept his focus on what was happening before him. He would have time to review the notification later.

"You knew of all this, and yet you did nothing?" Elena asked, anger radiating from her voice.

"You can only blame yourselves for misinterpreting my intentions. I told you all that the pressure of an extinction-level threat will produce many excellent students. You thought I told you to keep the war going so that many students would be born from the pressure. But the truth was, you never needed to hold back, for facing the Kraven, you really are facing an extinction level threat."

The creature paused, but then shook its head and continued speaking.

"But you do not need to fret too much. Ventura will not allow the realm to be actually destroyed. An exam is being prepared for some of our elite students who will be sent to the Crystal realm to destroy the treasures the Kraven are using to feed on the laws of the realm. At most, the foundation of the realm will be damaged but not destroyed. Of course, if you feel like that is unacceptable, you can fight against the Kraven yourself."

"To be honest, you all think that Ventura needs your cooperation to maintain its interests, but that could not be farther from the truth. Whether the war is kept on going, or ended prematurely, it does not affect Ventura at all. After all, we have more than one objective in this realm. Just ask the Crystal race if you are interested in knowing more..."

The creature suddenly paused and looked to the side, where a new figure had emerged from the shadows. Even Lex had failed to detect the new figure, though that was because without the incarnation of the Innkeeper, his senses had all been reduced in potency once again. He was, after all, just a projection.

"So while I slept, my home has become the playground of giants," said the figure, his voice calm and smooth, and most pleasing to listen to.

The new figure showed no animosity towards the Bravenheart who was so callously taking advantage of their realm. After all, it understood the truth of power better than anyone else here.

"You are finally awake," said Firin in a hushed tone.

"I could have woken up a long time ago, but what is the point? The deity of Crystal has long suppressed us, and betrayed us to these outsiders."

Shaking its head, as if it did not want to discuss things, the figure turned and looked towards Lex.

"The voice I heard earlier said that any who give the head of Belail can be brought out of this realm and provided an opportunity to grow. Does that hold true for deities as well?"

"Yes," said Lex, though he had a suspicion the request was not so easy. But he had faith in the system. Surely it could achieve it. Just to be safe, he should really look into deities, and any restrictions they had.

"I look forward to being your colleague in the future," the figure said amicably before vanishing. His confidence was through the roof, and he could even easily ignore the oppressive aura of the Bravenheart. Whoever the figure was, he was far from simple.

The Bravenheart, instead of being offended, only smiled, and departed, leaving behind a group of unresigned immortals.

"He is mostly lying," Cornelius told Lex, using his spirit sense. "I suspect he was too afraid of your senior, and so made things sound better. There is definitely more to this than it seems."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 712: Wedding

Lex did not turn to look at Cornelius, lest it become obvious that the two were conversing via spirit sense. Still, his curiosity piqued.

"What makes you think he is lying?" he asked.

"His entire personality has changed all of a sudden. That is the manager of Chaotic-Gold Ventura, so his identity is far from common. He sees everyone is beneath him, especially if their cultivation level is low.

"The last time he was here, he was extremely overbearing. Moreover, he made it abundantly clear that he did not want anyone interfering with the Kraven. The Polioids, who were the ones being affected the most, were unsatisfied with such a demand, and so he destroyed their entire country in one blow. How else could the Kraven have taken over an entire country so quickly, but not be able to replicate the feat hundreds of years later with the rest?

"I cannot say what his true objective is, but I strongly believe that it has something to do with the treasures the Kraven are using, and maybe this upcoming exam that he mentioned."

"If his objective is to hold the exam he mentioned, do you think he will interfere in your efforts to stop the destabilization of the realm?"

"No, I don't think so, and I think that has something to do with your elder who came. He must have a special identity, or something we don't know about must have happened, or he would not be behaving so well. There's even a good chance some of us might have died today."

Lex reflected on all that had happened. Besides the conversation he had with Cornelius, there were a few more interesting things, for example the shadowy figure that appeared out of nowhere, but could ignore the Ventura branch manager, and seemed to be familiar with the two deities.

There was also the conversation they had, about how the Crystal deity betrayed them. Did that have something to do with the unusual behavior of the Crystal race? Not to mention, although the figure was clearly using divine power, he also strongly radiated the power of monsters. What was his relationship with the monsters?

Lex could just assume that he was the reason that the monsters existed in this realm, or were born from the darkness, but then that would make the figure much too powerful, even more than the other two deities. Something was definitely amiss.

Although Lex had gotten the answer to his question, which was what the anomaly was, it seemed the mysteries of the Crystal realm were far from over.

But that did not matter, right now at least. He had a wedding to finish, hopefully. After all, he was not aware of the damage the Kraven had caused besides attacking his tavern.

"What's the state of the town?" Lex asked out loud.

"Besides the few who were near the tavern, no one else was hurt. No one even knows about the Kraven attack, though they most definitely felt the aura. The isolation realm is perfect for such situations," explained Firin.

"In that case, I have a wedding to finish. Since you've all already arrived, stay till it's over," said Lex, though he could not make demands of them. He was not yet sure if their participation and the events that took place here would count as a part of the wedding yet.

Turning back to his tavern, which was in a poor condition, Lex immediately began working. He summoned workers from the Inn, much like he had summoned Ash, and got them working on cleaning up the place immediately. Moreover, he had them collect all those who were hurt or harmed and sent them to the Inn to be healed.

He looked at the formations he had available. Originally, for the tavern, Lex was using formations that were beyond his current authority level. Now, though, he could only stick to what he had. Still, he had grown a lot since he founded the tavern, and so even without the cheats he had decent protection available.

Although there were no spatial formations, setting up a protective formation that could block a few attacks from an immortal was still possible, albeit expensive.

In half an hour, the place looked brand new, with the only indicator that anything had happened at all was the strange lack of guests and the new workers as compared to the ones everyone was familiar with.

The leaders had, for one reason or another, decided to stay till the wedding ended. Although Lex did not join them, they seemed to be discussing alliances and what to do moving forward. Until they stopped the Kraven from actively destabilizing the realm, there could be no remedy, so no one bothered Lex for now. Only once they finished their own objective would they come back to Lex and seek his help.

It was at this time that the two processions finally arrived at the tavern. They had slowed down due to the attack, and had more or less come to a halt while their own immortals investigated the situation. The Kraven had cleverly laid down a few formations around town meant to slow down reinforcements, which the divine birds removed once the battle was over.

Seeing that there seemed to be no issue, the processions had continued, although now they were slightly more cautious.

Yet when they arrived at the tavern all their worries vanished, as Cornelius II, the King of the Hum nation was standing there, awaiting their arrival. The rest of the leaders... decided it would be best if they remained hidden from sight.

Lex watched from the sides, not able to enjoy the event nearly as much as everyone else for he had a lot riding on this. Even when the two processions, and Pvarti and Jasmine clasped hands to continue the remainder of their journey together, Lex felt naught but concern over the quest level. He was not, for even a moment, bitter about his status as a single man besides becoming a mighty cultivator and having such a successful business under his name.

On a completely unrelated note, he considered starting a dating service at the Inn.

The various ceremonies began. Members of the two families, and past admirers for both Jasmine and Pvarti blocked their way.

The two had to either fight, negotiate or maneuver past all obstacles without letting go of each other's hands, signifying that through all the difficulties and hurdles in life they will work together, whether the hurdles be from their past or future.

It took longer than anticipated, for Pvarti's sister had brought a large group of rather 'mature' women to act as Pvarti's past admirers and, to be honest, Jasmine was enjoying Pvarti's attempts to remain cool through the ordeal all too much. But even without that, Pvarti was quite a sociable person, so his list of admirers was actually much larger than Jasmine's, despite her status from such a noble family.

Once they finally entered the tavern, and took their seats at the place of honor, more ceremonies, this time of a solemn and serious nature took place. A majority of the guests remained outside, where music and dancing was used to entertain them. The free and perpetually flowing drinks from the tavern also served to keep the guests occupied.

After a few hours, Pvarti and Jasmine took their oaths of companionship, and each performed the matrimonial spiritual technique used by nobles in the Crystal realm.

The technique could only be used once, and would forever alter the signature of both their spiritual energies. Not only would both of them be stronger, taking on a small fraction of the other's affinities, but the effects their spiritual energy had on one another would change.

The specific effects depended mostly on the nature of each person's cultivation technique and affinities, but it was usually positive. In their case, Pvarti's spiritual energy would give Jasmine an energizing effect, boosting her energy and recovery rate, while Jasmine's would allow Pvarti to heal from injuries quicker. They cultivated while holding hands, the results of their cultivation would also be quicker.

The two were now bound, not only by the contract of marriage, but by the very energy through their very own cultivation!

Outside the tavern, fireworks went soaring through the sky, signifying that the union was complete!

Compared to a normal wedding among nobles, which would last anywhere between one to three months, this was a very quick wedding. But considering the ongoing war, this was already the height of extravagance they could afford.

Since the tavern was too small to accommodate all the guests, the couple moved to the roof and one by one the guests would fly over to hand their gifts. Gift giving was a very significant part of weddings among nobles, for often enough, if the children involved were not inheriting the family title, they would take on a supporting role in the family, or begin a family of their own. In either case, such gifts would help them go a long way.

Lex clenched his fists. The wedding was finally about to end, and he was about to give his gift soon. He wondered how everyone would react to it.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 713: Gifts

The gift giving ceremony was just one of many. Some might consider the process to be unnecessarily complicated and tedious, but such an assumption was lacking in perspective. Excluding special situations, such as the ongoing war during this wedding, most of the time the nobility tried to make everything as long and detailed as possible. Even if most members of nobility never reached the immortal realm, it was completely normal for them to reach the Nascent realm.

The average Nascent realm cultivator could live up to 500 years, give or take a few. With such long lives to look forward to, most of their activities were slow paced and would take a long time. This phenomenon became more obvious the greater the cultivation level a person had.

Society would, similarly, adapt and hold events according to the life spans and expectations of the longest or most important being. Even in the Origin realm this was the case, with the 'upcoming' Tournery being organized by the Henali. It would be another decade before the tournament even began, and Lex did not even want to consider how long the actual tournament was likely to be.

Regardless, it was completely normal for there to be many ceremonies during a wedding, but among all of those, the gift giving ceremony was a favorite not only for the bride and groom, but all the spectators as well.

The gift did not have to be publicly revealed, although many did so in a display of their own wealth or the close relationship to the newlyweds. In a high profile wedding such as this one, the gifts would surely be great so everyone watched with great expectations.

The first to give a gift would be close friends of the bride and groom. Moreover their gifts could not be too spectacular, and should be equivalent to their status as a person from the younger generation. The reason for this was that the following guests to give gifts would be the ordinary guests or distant acquaintances. Naturally one could not forcefully expect them to give extremely expensive gifts, so by starting off at a low or moderate level, they would not be embarrassed to give ordinary gifts.

Of course, ordinary here was also relative as the number of spirit stones of valuables treasures being given at this level even as 'ordinary' gifts were beyond what truly normal people could afford.

As impatient as Lex felt, he had to ensure the wedding went well so he patiently watched each moment to ensure everything progressed as planned. Several hours later, it was finally time for the parents to give gifts.

Pvarti's parents handed over the deed to a very profitable spirit mine, effectively removing it from the 'Noel' family name, and handing it to Pvarti. For now nothing would change, but in the future if Pvarti ever wanted to start his own family, he would no longer start from scratch as he would have an astounding level of wealth to support him.

Jasmine's parents did not hand over a mine, but gave each of them something extremely personal yet useful. They gave both of them custom made swords, refined using Etherium ore. Etherium was used in the manufacturing of treasures appropriate for immortals, so the weapons they received were exorbitantly expensive, not to mention powerful. They could also accompany them for many years to come, if not the rest of their lives!

With such magnificent gifts given, everyone turned to look at King Cornelius. As the person of highest authority here, he should give the last gift. But what surprised everyone was that he did not make a move. Instead, one of the workers from the Inn stepped forward.

"Upon hearing of this auspicious event, Lord Sabr, ruler of the Varn, took the liberty of sending a gift for the newly wed couple."

The worker opened a small chest that he lay on the ground in front of him. It was filled to the brim with some fruit that looked like grapes, yet the gasps and reaction it received was too great for mere grapes.

These were a unique fruit that could be cultivated only by the Varn, and was one of the items they traded with the Hum nation most often. There was no market price for it, for no one who had ever received one thought to sell it.

It was called Purple Poison Berry, because it was extremely poisonous to the Varn, yet to humans it was the most exquisite tonic. If taken in normal health, a single berry could cure the body of any and all accumulated hidden injuries and diseases through their cultivation journey. That included injuries to the meridians, and to a very small degree, even the Golden Core!

This was a mighty gift indeed, and all the guests who did not know about what was happening behind the scenes began to speculate on what this meant. Did the two families have a secret relationship with the Varn?

Just as everyone was lost in thought, another worker stepped forward.

"Lord Kritter, founder of the new Poliod nation, sends his regards." He too took out a gift that blew away all spectators, the newlywed couple included.

Before they could recover, more workers stepped forward.

"Lady Elena of the Trellops..."

"Edward of the new Monster nation..."

"Abrax the Sentinel King..."

"The divine bird of flame, Firin..."

"The divine bird of ice, Aizel..."

From mere shock to astonishment, ultimately to extreme horror, the emotions of all the observers were going through a rollercoaster. Who didn't know the current situation in the realm right now? What were all these leaders doing sending gifts instead of worrying about the war? There was definitely something going on behind the scenes that they didn't know about.

Cornelius finally stepped forward to give his gift, berating no truth of what was really going on. He wore a soft smile, as if looking down fondly at some kids he knew personally.

"The younger generation is our future, and only if they succeed will our future be secure. Once, when I was young, someone gave me a chance that changed my life. Now, for you, I will do the same. Take these cards and use them when you are ready. If you pass the test, you can receive the guidance of a Heavenly Immortal."

The cards Cornelius was giving... were actually invitation cards to Ventura! But Ventura was a secret he could not openly disclose, so instead he titled it an opportunity to receive guidance from a Heavenly Immortal. This time, guests were too shocked to even gasp, and just froze.

What did they just hear? WHAT DID THEY JUST HEAR?

Just as everyone was reeling from what they heard, another figure came forward, this time from within the tavern. By now, everyone was too fatigued to continue to feel surprised. They just looked at the person and wondered who was worthy of presenting a gift after the King?

It turns out it was the tavern owner. Shouldn't he have gone before? Why was no one bothered that he went last, which was usually reserved for the most honored guest?

"Pvarti, when you first entered my tavern, so long ago, with the intention of partying with the locals, I never would have imagined you were actually hiding the depression of an engagement broken. Yet now, here we are, at your wedding to the same girl. As your friend, I could not be happier for you.

"And Jasmine, you have the great fortune of ending up with my good friend Pvarti. From afar one might assume that he is too casual about life, but I know no one else who would face the pressure of a great

noble family such as yours based solely on their principles and morals. You have with you a man who would rather give up on his life of comfort than compromise on his beliefs, and that takes great courage and dedication.

"To build your new life together, especially in these times, will also require great courage and dedication. As such, I hope my small gift can help you in your journey of life."

As much as it hurt him, Lex used up his Tea cup containing the law of femininity in exchange for this item. He considered it an investment in his own future, as he really needed the quest to get a good evaluation.

From within his spatial bangle, he produced a single apple. Though it looked exceedingly ordinary, every single immortal in the vicinity suddenly honed their gaze onto it, for they could feel their very soul aching for that fruit!

"This is called an Apple of Creation. It fell prematurely from the Tree of Creation, but that is enough to meet your needs. If you divide it amongst yourselves and eat it, it will aid you greatly in your comprehension of laws. It does not matter if you've reached the immortal realm or are in the nascent, the benefits of it will not be wasted. My recommendation is to have it as soon as possible."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 714: Planck Protos

It was thus that the warbringer finished his final task, his purposes known only to himself, from the realm of Crystal. His last appearance in these lands, for a long time at least, was filled with the sounds of celebrations, and the walls around him were adorned in marigold and roses and flowers unknown.

In the streets the crowds of people rejoiced for all the free boons that had befallen them, a timely reprieve during tough times. In the homes of nobles and dignitaries and other important personages, he was discussed in hushed tones and whispers - the mysteries surrounding him were just too great to be ignored.

For all intents and purposes, his actions showed no indication of malice or an ulterior motive. Yet all the same, as he departed those lands, he stayed true to his name, and the ongoing war entered a new level the likes of which those lands had never witnessed.

From every shadow, every dark corner or deep alley, emerged monsters that could evoke fear even in the hearts of nightmares themselves. From long forgotten pits emerged legions, and from all the abyss that remained unknown marched out armies.

The evil born from the dead of night pit itself against the invading forces of carnage and the ultimate result was carnage. There was no step back, nor any bastion to retreat to. With the departure of the warbringer, the realm of Crystal had launched the war for the survival of the realm itself.

The few who knew of his involvement behind the scenes remained grateful. If not for the warbringers help, they would not even know the war they had been ignoring was for the fate of their realm? But at the same time, they remained ignorant that every piece of land that had been cursed by the warbringers footsteps had fallen prey to conflict.

The warbringers very own homeplanet was embroiled in a clash between man and machine, the use of weapons of mass destruction slowly coming to foreview.

The first planet he visited when he began his journey across space was embroiled in a war between men and demons, from which the war bringer made money selling tickets to view the chaos.

The planet of beasts that he lay his feet upon was undergoing an upheaval, bringing about drastic change in the social order and thus giving way to endless conflicts for territories or resources.

The farming planets he toured were victim to endless assassination, to the point where the ruling family no longer even had the courage to pursue suspects, and had requested help from the ruling empire.

Yet who would help the ruling empire themselves, for any planet he lay his feet upon was embodied in conflict unending. His friend, the dutiful soldier, had invited him for aid, unaware that he had set himself up for events that would shock the entire realm, let alone a meager planet or empire.

Through none of this was the warbringer ever to blame. He never caused evil, nor did he have a conviction to bring harm. No fight was ever his fault, yet always he remained involved in some capacity, whether it was known to him. After all, he was called warbringer, not warmonger!

SLAM!

The acolyte who was writing in his visions, recording all that he saw in his crystal orb, shut the heavy journal when he heard his master call out his name.

"Yes master, what is it?" he asked politely.

"That's enough practice for today," answered his master who entered the room. The master was bald from the top though he had some hair still right above his ears. He was dressed in long, formal robes that looked like it was a uniform.

"Quickly get changed and prepare yourself. We will be traveling to the Origin realm shortly, from where we will attend the Fortune Tellers convention!"

"Yes master," the acolyte answered, already forgetting everything he wrote about in his journal. After all, who knew who this warbringer was? The acolyte would probably never get a chance to cross him. The convention, on the other hand, was an opportunity for him to finally meet others like him.

It was clear which one was more important.

The gift giving ceremony ended after Lex gave his gift, for not only was he the last person to give a gift, but no one else would be able to follow up after such a gift even if he weren't the last.

There were only a few more ceremonies to go through afterwards, but they were mostly rushed. Not only did everyone have to get to their various responsibilities, the bride and groom themselves were impatient to try out the effects of the apple.

As such, in the seeming blink of an eye, the wedding was finally over. Lex bade his farewell to the leaders, and dismissed his projection so that he could finally look at his quest completion notification!

New Notification: Quest Complete! Source of anomaly detected! System is making adjustments to avoid such anomalies in the future.

Quest: Investigate the source of the anomaly in the Crystal Realm!

Quest Complete! Anomaly source: perpetual inter-realm wormhole!

Reward: Realm Seed!

Remarks: Host has the foresight to prepare aids for the sprouting of the Realm Seed. How unusual

New Notification: Taro' Fertilizer detected! Should the Realm Seed be fertilized? Y/N!

Lex did not hesitate to give his permission. Of course he could not wait to get his own realm! He had already waited long enough!

New Notification: Realm Seed has been planted within the system! Realm Seed has been fertilized!

New Notification: Warning! Due to system maintenance, Midnight Inn will temporarily stop accepting new guests in 6 months while new changes are implemented. Existing guests will be allowed to stay and can leave at their discretion.

New Notification: Approximate time to sprouting of Realm Seed is 2 years. Please make thorough preparations!

The notifications immediately dampened Lex's mood, for a part of him was expecting immediate results. Logically he should not expect such massive results to appear immediately, but he could only blame the system for spoiling him by getting him used to immediate benefits.

He was also a little disappointed because he did not want his workers to continuously fight for two years. They themselves were not two years old, he could not even imagine what two years of war would do to their psyche! Moreover, despite his preparations, what if they were unable to survive? But he could not do anything about that for now. Even this was already more than any normal person could reasonably ask for!

To lift his spirits, he turned his attention to the notifications about his other, recently completed quest.

Quest: Host a wedding worthy of the union about to take place!

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

- Reward upgraded for holding the wedding within a year!
- Reward upgraded for achieving an unprecedented guest list!
- Reward upgraded for Monster nation revealing themselves during the wedding!
- Reward upgraded for wedding hosting an epoch-defining meeting!
- Reward upgraded for wedding gifts altering the destiny of the realm!
- Reward upgraded for attendance of multi-realm organization Ventura!
- Reward upgraded for attendance of projection of being above Dao realm!

Reward Rank: ??? (Authority Insufficient)

Error: Interference from '???'

Reward Rank: Death

Reward: 1 pP (Planck Protos: 1×10^{-32} Protos Joule), Chamber of Rebirth (single use), Midnight Castle Blueprint

Remarks: ...the host finally got a pP...

New Notification: 1 Planck Protos detected! Use to repair system? Y/N?

Reading the notifications, Lex was genuinely confused by the ranks the system was giving. He had been researching on Destiny rank, especially since he got locked in a Destiny ranked formation, but had yet to discover something. Now he was facing the Death rank. Why did these not really sound like ranking?

Moreover... when had he been visited by a projection above the Dao realm! My goodness! Was there even a level above the Dao realm? He had never heard any mention of it anywhere!

It was... it was beyond scary. He had nearly died just from entering a hall meant for Dao Lords. What in the world could be above them?

Moreover, what was up with his rewards? Why did nothing look like it could solve his cultivation problem?

Was it this Chamber of Rebirth? Did he have to be born again, and then cultivate from the beginning to overcome the situation? That didn't sound right.

A very familiar voice, at that point, whispered in his ear.

"Do not use the Planck Protos on the system. Absorb it yourself, and your cultivation technique should fix itself. It should not take too long, just a day. Oh, but if you prefer to fix the system, you can do that too. Your system will be repaired to 100%, though the repair time will be a few months. The choice is yours."

The voice belonged to the mysterious elder who had one day visited his room at the Midnight Inn. Now he was left with a choice. Fix the system, or repair his cultivation technique?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 715: Making a decision

To be perfectly honest, Lex already knew what he preferred to do, but that did not stop him from his introspection. After all, important decisions should not be made in a rush. To start with, his intention from the get go for doing his best in the quest was to get a reward that would let him fix his cultivation. So it should be an easy choice to directly fix his cultivation technique.

But it simultaneously needed to be considered that his greatest reliance was the system. The whole reason this quest paid off was his system, and the more powerful his system was the greater use he could get out of it. For example the various formations he had available to protect the tavern were no longer as excellent as before. Sure, much of that had to do with authority as well, but if one claimed that the system's damaged status was not contributing then he would find it hard to believe.

He could help his staff better, and a more powerful system would no doubt play an even greater role now that he was on his way to getting a new realm. Then again, the system could also be repaired bit by bit by absorbing other systems.

His cultivation technique could also theoretically be fixed by absorbing items containing laws, as he had done with the Cosmic Erosion Elixir, but who knew how long that would take. Moreover, and the point that Lex paid the most attention to, was that if the cultivation technique really could be fixed in such a manner, why didn't the mysterious man say so? Instead, he only told Lex to fix it using the reward from the quest.

There had to be a reason for this. Of course, Lex could assume that this was simply a blindspot for the mystery man, and he didn't know about it or forgot to mention it. But when taking into consideration the identity and power of such an enigmatic figure, it was best to assume he knew exactly what he was doing.

Of course, if he had any hidden agendas or ulterior motives, Lex would have absolutely no way of knowing. Not to mention, with the difference in their power levels, he did not need to be careful when dealing with Lex and could directly force him, or maybe even hypnotize him if he had any such motives.

In summary, Lex could not guess the man's intentions or what he knew or didn't, so it was best not to think about it. Instead, his focus should be on his own concerns. As much as Lex used the system for his benefit, he ultimately didn't trust it at all. It was ultimately too mysterious, and he absolutely refused to believe that he could get such a good deal without having to pay anything back at all. Not to mention, the system was already much more powerful than Lex, and could easily threaten his life, as it had done in its early days.

Who knew if it might restart doing the same if it resumed to full power, and found Lex as a host lacking. So, regardless of how much Lex used the system, he could not trust it at all. Instead, it was his own powers that he could rely on the most. Not to mention, even if fixing the system was the better choice, the resignation filling Lex's heart could not wane.

He could not help but feel pride when he acted as the Innkeeper. Who could possibly avoid it when one could assume such a powerful role? But what was the point of that pride if he could do nothing to save his own people?

Although Lex was not necessarily close to them on a personal level, he still felt responsible. Yet even now, his workers from the tavern lay comatose in their recovery pods, healing. He could not even imagine the suffering that Big Ben and his wife would go through if they survived and learned of their unborn child's fate.

Lex, naturally, did not believe that he could control the whole universe, and prevent all bad things from happening to those close to him. But... he was not even capable of taking revenge himself, and that is where his frustration came from.

He took a deep breath, and quickly suppressed his agitated feelings. His decision was made. For better or worse, he was prioritizing his personal growth first. Sure a fully healed system could possibly bring him the opportunity to fix his cultivation once again, but he did not want to wait or depend on luck.

First, however, he continued to check up on his rewards. The Planck Protos, which was the smallest possible measurement of the energy known as Protos Energy, which was normally measured in Protos Joule. Of course, he didn't know if that's how the rest of the universe measured it, but just that his universal translator automatically translated everything as such to him.

There was no official description for this energy, and the only reason he knew it could heal the system was because of the notification, and the only reason he knew it could fix his cultivation was because the mysterious senior told him. This energy was truly mystifying, and he would look into it when he had the chance.

The next reward was called the Chamber of Rebirth, and could only be used once. Lex focused on it to read its description.

Chamber of Rebirth (Single use)

The ultimate healing device. So long as a living being is alive, with even a fragment of its soul intact, it will be completely reborn regardless of any injury it sustained. No curses, karma, bloodlines, cultivation, or anything else affiliated to the previous identity will be passed on, with memories being the sole exception. Whoever uses it will be completely reborn anew!

Lex whistled. This was an incredible item, for more than one reason. It could completely heal someone regardless of the injury they sustained, and could even remove bloodlines. Although he himself did not know the full details of what removing things such as karma entailed, he could at least guess for the bloodline. Besides losing the bloodline ability, it seemed as if the person would no longer even be related by blood to his original family.

To be honest, this was not such a shocking thing to Lex anymore. As a normal human back on earth, the idea of altering DNA so as to remove any connection to your family seemed not only just absurd but impossible.

But the very act of cultivation altered a person's DNA. If it did not, upon healing after sustaining an injury, the healed body part would return to being mortal as was encoded in his original DNA. It was only because his very being changed, down to the very last fiber, that cultivation was so mysterious and yet amazing. It was also why achieving every new realm raised one to a lifeform of a higher order.

Anyway, for now Lex did not have any need for any such thing. But he still intended on saving this for his own use. If ever he got so wounded that he was on the verge of death, this chamber could save him. Sacrificing his cultivation was a steep price to pay, but as long as he was alive, he could cultivate again. But if he wasn't, what was the point of retaining his cultivation?

He focused on the next reward, which was quite interesting. It was called the Midnight Castle Blueprint.

Midnight Castle Blueprint

A blueprint that allows for the construction of the Midnight Castle. This Castle can be built within the territory of the Inn or outside, but only one can be built. The resources to build this castle are extremely rare, and the requisite skill to build the castle itself are impossibly high!

Lex frowned. Besides this simple introduction, there was no more detail on what the features of the castle would be, and if it had any specific role or purpose. The blueprint immediately dove into the materials needed, and the list was massive. Moreover, the few names that Lex recognized from the list were all materials that were used for immortals!

He sighed. He had received yet another drain on his resources.

Putting all such thoughts out of his mind, he scanned the Inn once to ensure that nothing was amiss, before entering his personal meditation room. Although he was warned that the upgrade to his cultivation would be quick, he did not want to take a chance. After clearing his mind and meditating until he was in his best state, Lex chose to absorb the Planck Protos.

The reward entered his body directly, and he never saw it or the container in which it was kept. The only reason he even knew that it had entered his body was because his cultivation technique began to circulate on its own. Soon, Lex got lost in the sensation of cultivation.

Moments after Lex's scan of the Inn, a guest blared her pressure down on one of the Inn's workers.

"Even if you are a worker of the Midnight Inn, you cannot escape the consequences of being disrespectful to a deity!"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 716: Accepting a challenge

Alissa Harmony had a long and deep history with the Midnight Inn. Once, long ago, she was naught more than a simple YouTuber who used to upload songs on her video channel. She had a great voice and a natural talent for singing, which made the process easier and fruitful.

She had a decent number of followers, and hoped to become a real celebrity one day. Then, in the Midnight Games, she won somehow.

That not only got her the attention of the many cultivators on earth, but the cooperation of many governments. Even a few powerful individuals and organizations who thought to use her connection with the Inn began to sponsor her, and soon her popularity blew through the roof.

Suffice to say her singing career took off, and she was even introduced to the cultivation world. Moreover, she got herself a cultivation technique expressly suited to enhance her charisma and appeal, further boosting her popularity.

Then the war happened. She became displaced, and all her popularity was for naught. Feeling completely distraught, she escaped to the Inn, and eventually became a refugee in their new Minor realm. Yet the Minor realm was a newly developing escape for humans of earth, and her singing talents had no use, as no one had the time to enjoy songs.

But when the deities came to Earth, she once again found her calling. She returned to Earth, giving up her refugee status, and willfully became an acolyte for Adamas, the deity of diamonds!

Her singing talents were once again put to good use, singing gospels and raising morale. She quickly gained the attention of the deities' strongest messengers, and then she was promoted time and time again.

Before she knew it, she even gained the right to use a small amount of divine energy, sent directly from the deity himself! She took on her new role as the highest priestess of Adamas on earth, and became a true, devout follower!

But lately the situation on earth had come to a stand still. The miscreant Marlo had deceived a way to create spiritual nuclear bombs, or the equivalent using only talismans. Why was this a big deal when actual nuclear bombs existed?

For lower level cultivators, they would be a deterrent, sure. Even if a few Nascent cultivators were targeted the threat could not be eliminated. But there was a fundamental rule of the universe that there were different tiers of energy, and even a small amount of energy from a higher tier could suppress a larger amount of energy from a lower tier.

A nuclear explosion caused by a bomb created through normal technology harnessed the most basic and fundamental energy that operated in the universe, and had no trace of spiritual energy. Enough

cultivators could easily suppress the explosion, or perhaps even harness the energy from the explosion for their own use. Just because earth lacked the means or cultivation techniques to do so did not mean others were the same.

A spec of divine energy was enough to contain an ordinary nuclear explosion, for example. But Marlo had created a similar result using spiritual energy. This was no ordinary feat, as the science behind it was completely different from ordinary bombs. Moreover, packaging such a payload into something as nominal as a talisman... it was the result of sheer genius!

The war had to be paused, as the A.I. suddenly became restricted by certain Henali conventions.

But this was only a short delay. The war would resume. The matter had long surpassed the original cause of the conflict, and now became a contest between deities and the A.I. A few interested parties had already started developing the solar system to become the site for many modern conflicts. The natives of the Earth could no longer ever hope to return for a peaceful resolution. They either had to leave, or join one of the camps.

King Marlo and his new empire were the only remnants of the old world, and the last remaining hope of those with the hopeless dream of reclaiming their lands.

During this pause, Alissa did not have much to do. So her heart suddenly yearned to return to the Inn, and spread the glory of the Diamond deity there as well. So long had she spent surrounded by the worship of the deities followers, that the lack of it at the Inn suddenly made her uncomfortable.

Still, she knew much about the Inn, and so did not start any conflicts. She humbled herself and spent some time among the ignorant non-believers.

Soon the feeling of discomfort faded, as she was reminded of her own simple roots. Comparing her life now to what it had been before truly increased her devotion for Adamas. As such, she decided to preach a little while she was enjoying her vacation. Casually she struck up a conversation with one of the workers who was nearby, and asked them what they thought of Adamas.

To her surprise, this worker had never heard of Adamas! She immediately began to preach, but to her increasing irritation, the worker only responded politely but did not seem to be interested at all. This

was a stark contrast to what she had experienced on earth, where the pathetic mortals had been easily impressed by the divine might of Adamas.

In the end, the worker could not help but say, "The members of the Inn don't really follow any deities. Besides, even if we had to worship anyone, why wouldn't we worship the Innkeeper? Who is Adamas when compared to the Innkeeper anyway?"

Technically, the worker should not have said that, as it was impolite towards the guests' belief. But no one was perfect, and it just came out.

Alissa was immediately infuriated, and her aura burst out!

"Even if you're the worker of the Midnight Inn, you cannot escape the consequences of being disrespectful to a deity!" she roared, her anger clouding her judgment.

But the worker did not even flinch. Where was this? The Midnight Inn! The security team was no longer inexperienced and ignorant, and they were perfectly capable of handling things. Even without the many powerful workers, who had gone off to war, there were still the entire security team, Young McDonald, Qawain, Lady Anita and many others. Lately, captain Cirk had even learned how to use the massive spaceships security features and so could immediately target anyone within range. Last but not least, Lex continuously had events going on at the Inn so that he could hire the extra security. How could anyone threaten someone inside the Inn and get away with it?

Yet, as it happened, it was none of those who interfered. A large, strong suddenly gripped Alissa's arm, suppressing not only her aura, but restricting her movements as well.

"Actually, they can," said a warm, yet firm voice. A man garbed in full metal armor had mysteriously and spontaneously appeared beside them, and prevented the situation from escalating.

"The Midnight Inn has provided a safe haven for all, irrespective of race. It is a noble and respectable act, and one which takes immense courage and power. I do not know which deity you serve, but there is no reason to create animosity between the Innkeeper and your deity. It would only be a loss to you and your fellow followers."

The man who spoke was Lovis, a paladin knight. Although he had not yet had the opportunity to meet the Innkeeper, he had begun to admire the Inn from the bottom of his heart. He could not tolerate anyone disrespecting such a wondrous holy land.

"It is the Innkeeper who should be careful! Trespassing onto the territory of deities and accepting the worship of others is not a burden so easily borne!" she replied in an agitated state.

But even if she was putting on the front of anger, her heart was quickly filled with fear. She knew the strength of the Inn well. It was not that she doubted Adamas, but there was no reason to put her life on the line. Instantly, she teleported out without letting the situation develop further.

"Thank you for your help," the worker said, "but you really should have let one of the security team members handle it. I would not have the courage to show my face if a guest got hurt on my behalf."

"Nonsense!" Lovis said while laughing. "To be a paladin is to have the heart of a protector! I cannot shy away when I see such actions."

"Lovis, you have been watching too much anime," said an elf who walked up to the man. The elf was one of those guests who perpetually lived inside the Inn, and so had developed many friendships with other guests who similarly spent a lot of time here.

"Such an artform that captures the essence of heroism can never be overconsumed!" he said, once again roaring into laughter.

"Besides, I have not much else to do these days. The Murder Grounds are busy, so I can do nothing but wait. The Paladins and the Diplo can no longer tolerate each other's existence, even if it is as neighbors in the Inn. There must be a resolution to this conflict, but until that happens, I can polish my mind by reviewing the recorded tales of the numerous heroes in anime."

As it happened, just as Lovis said this, there was an announcement inside the Inn.

"General Ragnar of the Jotun Empire had once challenged Warheil Heil Fendal to a fight in the Murder Grounds, but the devil has responded, and selected the Inn's colosseum as the venue of the fight! If he dares to come, Warheil will be waiting there in 24 hours!"

The Inn was suddenly filled with energy and excitement as everyone began discussing the upcoming fight! The challenge was well known and frequently discussed. For so long, the humans had been calling the devils cowards for not accepting yet. But now they had finally accepted, and accepted it with style.

Elsewhere in the Inn, a devil was smirking as he saw the excitement spread, as if he was satisfied with the results of his announcement. Suddenly, a member of the security team teleported in front of him.

"For noise pollution and causing a disturbance without permission, you are fined 1000 MP as a first warning. Please submit the fine as soon as possible to avoid being expelled from the Inn."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 717: Don't aim too high

Primary Realm, Gaia's graveyard

Outside a cottage made of the most sublime wood, an old man was watering the ground from a common watering-can. The can was completely and totally normal, and not made from the bones of the Juggernaut King - whose body was identified as the hardest existing material in the universe.

The water, too, was ordinary well water, and not the dew condensed on the surface of the Tablet of Life, a divine item some believed was the source of all life in the universe.

It was this old man's habit to spend his time doing such mundane things, as they filled him with a sense of simplicity. There was no ulterior motive in his actions at all whatsoever.

But, today, something extraordinary happened in this otherwise, completely ordinary and not at all fantastical place. A closed scroll began to materialize in his hand, at first just as a vague image, as if it was naught more than a mirage. But slowly, it began to solidify.

The man smiled and kept the scroll in his vault which was filled with other miraculous things. In front of the scroll was a small plaque that read 'Regal Embrace'. This was a cultivation technique of an extremely spectacular status, and could only be practiced by one person in the universe. After all, the 'strongest' was not a title that could be replicated, or else it would no longer be the strongest. Similarly, there could only be one person who had the best defense.

But even the Regal Embrace, a cultivation technique which could allow its cultivator to survive the destruction of the universe itself at its peak, did not require a resource as rare and powerful as Protos Energy. At the point at which Lex absorbed this, his cultivation technique used the spectacular features of this wondrous energy, and evolved beyond the Regal Embrace.

No one could say for certain what it would evolve into in the future, not even the humble old man in the cottage. But, since it surpassed the limits of what Regal Embrace could achieve, the Regal Embrace was naturally once again available for cultivation.

Their parting had been so short, much shorter than the last time someone tried to cultivate the Regal Embrace. The only difference was that this time, the cultivator did not die prematurely.

Midnight Inn

As of late, Lex had started to feel the effects of his busy schedule on his cultivation. He barely had any time to cultivate, but in his earlier realms the effects of such an act was always mitigated. Either through absorbing the abundant energy of a claimed Minor realm, or discovering a magical plant that boosted his cultivation, he would always speed up his cultivation.

But in the Golden core, it was a lot harder to suddenly boost his cultivation. He had also been a lot busier, and so could not randomly go on an adventure and gain spectacular results. When he did cultivate on and off in his free time, he could only lament his slow growth.

Of course, only Lex could say he was cultivating at a slow pace, and anyone else in the universe would beg to differ.

But despite his many complaints, only now that he was forced to cultivate dedicatedly, and without distraction for a long time that he realized that done a true disservice to his cultivation.

Though he cultivated with peace of mind, as he had become used to meditating, he had never reveled in it. He had never thought about the mysterious flow of energy in his body, nor had he enjoyed the process it was a part of. His care was only for the results.

Though one could not really blame him for only caring about the results, he realized that he needed to give more attention and respect to the process as well. It was the process by which he was undergoing an evolution. It was laying the foundation for his future. It was extremely mysterious. It was... it was... also extremely boring.

Sitting still and unable to do anything else as his cultivation technique ran on its own, Lex had countless thoughts. Although he did realize the drawback of not giving enough time to his cultivation, he also realized that it would be much harder to do so if he didn't thoroughly enamor himself with the process in the future.

As he cultivated further, and his mind evolved, his processing power would increase tremendously. While previously all his focus was spent on his cultivation, eventually he would reach the stage where a large portion of his mind was free to have random thoughts, and also to be bored.

It was something he would have to overcome. For now, he could only occupy his mind by focusing on the changes his technique underwent. Despite his secret hope, absorbing the Planck Protos did not make his cultivation explode, like it did back in the Foundation realm. In fact, his cultivation level did not move at all. Instead, it seemed like his technique was evolving with each cycle it went through.

Lex's newly improved memory allowed him to easily identify even the subtlest of changes, and memorize exactly how it changed each step. Although for now he could not understand its relevance, maybe one day in the future he could look back and learn or discover something from it.

Like this, an entire day slowly went by, and then the better part of the second day. It was only when dusk was beginning to fall that Lex's cultivation finally finished, and he regained control over his body.

To his disappointment, his cultivation did not change at all. It seemed he would not be getting a shortcut to a higher cultivation level any time soon. But he simultaneously could not say that there was no change at all.

Like when he first entered his new realm, his cultivation technique barraged his mind with a stream of new information that allowed him to understand many things in greater detail than ever before. Moreover, he also faced the revelation that his cultivation technique had evolved and had surpassed the Regal Embrace, and thus was nameless for the time being. Whatever it was called would be his decision in the future.

But that information was not nearly as important as what it signified. Regal Embrace gave Lex the best defense in the universe, but it achieved as much by putting heavy restrictions on Lex which would become even more obvious as his level grew. The most obvious restriction was his inability to learn attacks.

This was because the kind of laws that the Regal Embrace relied on were so heavily focused on defense that even the idea of offense was repulsed by the technique. For now Lex found a way to circumvent this situation by relying on arrays, but in the future he would have discovered that things were not so easy. One could not achieve the 'most' in any field without entering some kind of extreme.

His new nameless cultivation technique removed that flaw. At the same time, the traits of his future cultivation were extremely malleable. But a lot of it would depend on his own actions as well. If he now began to develop his cultivation technique to become strong, while reducing his focus on defense, then in the future he would no longer be able to achieve the status of having the strongest defense! This was because even though the technique had surpassed the Regal Embrace, its ultimate result would be dependent on himself.

It was like he gave up the option of a guaranteed good result, in exchange for the potential of a better one. But, alongside the potential of a good result was also the potential for a worse outcome.

Lex snorted. He was not afraid of getting a worse result at all. He had proven his worth time and time again with all the trials he faced, and in fact preferred things to be this way. This was because he did not want to think that he had achieved everything just because he had a good cultivation technique. Now, with the ability to influence the technique himself, he wanted to achieve an even greater height.

He remembered that Regal Embrace could survive the destruction of the universe, and had another technique beside it which could destroy the universe itself!

If that was the case, he wouldn't aim too high. He just wanted to achieve such incredible strength that he could even break the Regal Embrace at its peak, and have such a sturdy body that he could face Mo's blessings strongest attack without flinching!

Since he had this technique which could surpass the Regal Embrace, then he would make it so that neither the Regal Embrace or Mo's blessing could ever match up to his level.

Somewhere far off in the Origin realm, a celestial who was cultivating suddenly opened his eyes. For some reason... his cultivation technique felt like it had been challenged!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 718: Preparing

Making the most out of his cultivation technique involved more than just deciding to do better. The nameless technique he was now cultivating was similar to Regal Embrace in the regard that it could adapt tremendously and had no upper limit. Unlike the Regal Embrace, however, it would not run into a problem where growing further could lead to death.

It was also extremely intuitive. For example, the moment Lex decided his goal of surpassing Regal Embrace and Mo's Blessing, the cultivation technique adapted automatically and informed him of what he needed to do to proceed.

As it turned out, cultivating the most powerful cultivation technique in the universe was extremely resource intensive. On his defensive front there was not much work needed, as Regal Embrace had built an adequate foundation for him to proceed from. The issue was his body's attack capabilities. He was severely lacking in them.

Much of that would automatically be fixed while he cultivated, and his new nameless technique adapted his body. But unless he wanted to spend the next hundred years just fixing his cultivation technique before even moving on, he needed to supplement his technique with multiple resources.

His body's base strength was incredibly high, which helped a lot. But great strength was only one aspect of offense, and he was wholly lacking in every other regard. Fortunately for him, most of the resources he needed to fix his existing cultivation could be easily found. Unfortunately, some of them were on the rare end of the spectrum.

That was also only considering his existing cultivation. To continue to cultivate while maintaining the standard that he wanted, he would either need to procure increasingly rare resources or cultivate

normally and spend a ridiculous amount of time to allow his cultivation technique to replace the effect of those resources normally.

Lex compiled the list of the resources he needed right now and checked if any were available at the Inn. Surprisingly a fair number of them were being sold at his very own Guild room by various merchants! Who knew his Guild room had grown to such a level?

Without wasting any time, he put up a request for the remaining material in the Guild room, and bought what was available. He teleported all his newly acquired materials to his meditation room, unable to suppress his eagerness to grow stronger.

Although his versatility with arrays was commendable, the sheer effectiveness of a proper attack was also not something to be overlooked. He couldn't wait to acquaint himself with some new techniques and see if he could learn them as quickly as he did with defensive ones.

Unfortunately, he could not randomly absorb everything he had gotten as there was a required process and sequence to things. This would be a time-consuming process, but compared to normal cultivation, he expected a quicker growth in his strength.

Without further ado, he began cultivating once again. Some materials could directly be eaten for Lex to absorb their features, while others had to be drained of their energies. Others still were just catalysts to be used in conjunction with other materials. There was one material in particular that simply required Lex to dip his feet into while cultivating. Clearly this would not be a straightforward process.

A few hours passed by, and Lex already began to subtly feel the difference. It was not his strength that had increased, or anything else for that matter. It was his natural aura that was slowly changing.

While previously, Lex's aura could be called warm or pleasant, most of the time, it was now gaining a honed edge. He did not know how that affected anything, but it was a start. Slowly and steadily, once he was finished fixing his current foundation to accommodate his new cultivation, every inch of his body would become lethal, much in the way that every inch of his body had the same toughness.

Feeling good about his progress, he teleported back to his office. It wasn't that he didn't want to continue cultivating, for the feeling of becoming noticeably stronger was quite addictive. He had not run

out of materials yet either. Instead, there was an optimal amount of time he could cultivate each day. Any more after that would only give diminishing returns.

"Did I miss anything while I was cultivating?" Lex asked Mary, more as a habit than from any expectation of anything happening.

"Yes, actually. You're just in time, in fact. Ragnar's challenge to the devil Warheil was finally accepted. They're about to conduct their battle in the colosseum in a few hours. If you had not gotten free on your own in a few hours, I would have called out to you to put up protective formations around the colosseum."

Lex raised an eyebrow. This really was an interesting event that he had also looked forward to. In fact, he already had plans set in place for when this happens.

"Have you done everything we decided regarding the match?"

"Yes. The moment the challenge was accepted by both parties, I immediately put the marketing plan into effect. Although it's a little short notice, everyone and their mothers will know about the fight as long as they visit the Inn."

Lex nodded as he overlooked the colosseum and began placing various formations. Ragnar had been the first one to require special attention while breaking through, and the amount of MP Lex investing in ensuring that no one suffers any harm due to him was a lot. As such, he felt no guilt about monetizing his fight for his own personal gain. It was just business.

There was still some time to the fight, so while Lex prepared to get the most benefit, he also began to wonder about his next steps. He would first check if Alexander needed his help, or if there was an update on the situation.

If not, it was high time he went after that treasure the mysterious man told him about. He recalled that the man had said he had approximately 6 months to find the treasure until someone else found it. He also said it could be sooner or later than that time, but not by much. In essence, Lex considered it as if he had no time at all!

But the issue with finding the treasure was that besides knowing which galaxy it was in, he knew next to nothing. How was he supposed to locate a 'belt of rogue planets' across the entire galaxy?

The mystery man must have known something or else he would provide more information. For example, what were the chances that the battlefield that his workers went to just happened to be in the same galaxy?

Though the Inn itself was not linked to that galaxy and the only connection present was through a teleportation formation that the system hijacked, that was just getting into the technicalities of things. The real issue was the teleportation point was the battlefield, so Lex could not use it to go to the rest of the galaxy.

He had to find some other way. Since he didn't really have any other leads for the moment, Lex logged on to the Henali portal and searched for 'belt of rogue planets' and 'Suera'. He was not expecting much, but even any random information could be useful.

Apparently, a collection of rogue planets was not at all rare, especially on a galactic scale. This was even when only considering the ones which had been detected and reported to the portal. The only redeeming factor Lex found was that a 'collection' of rogue planets was not necessarily a 'belt of rogue planets'.

On the list, there was only one listed group of rogue planets which could resemble a belt, meaning a relatively straight line.

There were only 89 planets in the belt, but of those only one supported sentient life. Considering the fact that there was no star nearby to provide the planet with warmth and energy, even that was a lot.

The only reason this was even listed was because apparently that one single planet had an extremely valuable export. That planet also happened to be the home of a mature dragon!

Lex began to plan something in his mind as he continued to read about the conditions on the planet. The Henali portal was actually quite useful. If Lex could always access it before he chose which planet to form a connection to in the future, he would have a much easier time avoiding trouble.

With a tentative plan made, Lex teleported over to X-14 from where he visited the Emporium. He placed a special order which would take some time to fulfill, but fortunately should be ready in a couple of days at most

With this, he was ready to set off. Now all that was left was to wait. In the meantime, he would make some money off of Ragnar. If only he had stronger formations available, he would have the confidence to have VIP seats, and charge even more for them. As it was, he had to make do with what he had.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 719: Billions

Since there were only a few hours to the fight, they passed by quickly. Given that there had only been a 24 hour notice, Lex did not expect too much of a crowd to gather. After all, there was not much time for the news to spread. Even then, by 'not too much of a crowd' Lex meant a few million guests. After all, Ragnar was quite a celebrated figure. In his own empire, or circles, no doubt Warheil was the same.

It was while having this thought that Lex realized that while he knew a lot about the Jotun empire, he knew next to nothing about the devils. It was something he needed to remedy.

Still, standing in the air above the colosseum, he was beginning to realize, he had no idea what a Heavenly Immortal truly represented.

With 1 hour still remaining to the fight, over 3 billion guests had already gathered at the Inn! Since it had already become one, regardless of whether Lex was originally planning for it or not, Lex turned the fight into an 'event'!

At first when he noticed the surge in guest arrivals, after establishing the event, Lex went through the usual motions. He allowed the match to be viewed from anywhere at the Inn, created millions of temporary rooms and hired more security.

When the guests reached the 1 billion mark, Lex was dumbfounded, and immediately felt the need to manage the crowds. As much as everyone wanted to be as close to the fight as possible, let alone the colosseum, the entire 'village' was too small to accommodate so many people. In fact, even if they spread across the entire Inn, it would be too crowded.

He had no choice but to implement certain rules. The colosseum seats, despite their normally large numbers, were too few and so were reserved for guests with a minimum of prestige level 4.

Up until prestige level 3, guests only needed to spend more MP to increase their prestige level. But 4 onwards there was a minimum cultivation requirement as well. As such, the lowest cultivation level allowed in the colosseum automatically became the nascent level.

Besides that, he changed the viewership rule for the match. The match could no longer be viewed from anywhere in the Inn. Instead, it could only be viewed from inside the colosseum or from within a rented room, whether it was a standard one or one of the temporary ones.

For a while, that reduced traffic drastically as everyone either rented rooms individually, or together.

Lex was dealing with a mind boggling number of guests, and as such his MP was fluctuating in a similar fashion. Before the event began, he had around 190 billion MP. Once 1 billion guests arrived, they rented an approximate 600 million regular room, which at 50 MP per day, gave Lex another 30 billion MP. He had to approximate because not everyone rented rooms, and not everyone rented simple rooms.

Then the number of guests grew to two billion, and then three! Even though a majority of the guests stayed in their rooms, just the few who roamed the Inn equaled to several hundred million.

The Immortal Bastion, which had once been empty and desolate, was now bursting at the seams as the many guests entertained themselves by venturing into the countless Minor realms. Moreover, with such a vast number of guests, new Minor realms which had been hidden across the Inn were being discovered faster than ever before.

It only made sense, since all the guests coming were absolute elites. There were already over 800 million Earth immortals at the Inn, though most of them sat in their rooms patiently. Most of them were devils, with the remainder being soldiers from the Jotun army.

There were few Heavenly immortals too, or at least, those whose level Lex could not identify and he guessed were at that level. Emperor Jotun was there himself, alongside his queen, and a number of his children. None of his brothers had come though.

As things got more and more chaotic, Lex took a deep breath and spent a massive 50 billion MP on more security! There were too many immortals at the Inn, and even the slightest spark could create overwhelming chaos. Especially since there was about to be a fight between two extremely decorated members of the human and devil race!

For once, Lex made a decision that went against his capitalistic side. He did not open up any betting, because he did not feel like he could afford to mess with the money of hundreds of millions of immortals!

Goddamn, why was the Inn so hot today? Lex wondered as he wiped a bead of sweat off his forehead, ignoring all the snow around him.

Only when the new security guards showed up, as well as the dragon, gryffin and other prominent guards he had seen before. They did not hesitate in displaying their overwhelming aura, though they only did so for a moment. They were there to deter, not intimidate.

As the final hour ended, up to 5 billion guests had come to the Inn! Most of the present guests were all either soldiers or elites of the Jotun empire, or devils. Despite this, Lex had to constantly focus on managing the situations and create temporary biomes with unusual environments, as too many of his guests were too uncomfortable without them.

So caught up was he, that he almost missed the fact that Emperor Jotun excused himself for a brief moment, and in secret visited Warheil - almost! Lex was not one who enjoyed gossip, but at that moment all his attention was diverted to the meeting. Unfortunately, they spoke through their spirit sense, if they spoke at all, and separated immediately.

A few minutes later, Ragnar entered the colosseum! A hush spread across the Inn as all eyes were fixed on him. For this occasion it seemed the man had made no special preparation. He wore his usual, extremely bulky armor with the only new addition being he was wearing his helmet as well. For a weapon he held only a flanged mace, seemingly made out of common iron.

Although his entrance had been extremely simple, and he stood there calmly as if it were just another day, the crowd was filled with excitement. Lex, especially, became extremely sensitive to the wave of emotions sweeping the Inn, for they somehow seemed to take on a life on their own, and began to exert their influence on everyone.

This was the first time Lex felt emotions exerting an actual physical pressure akin to the aura of a high level cultivator. Perhaps it needed a large enough collection of people, or perhaps the people involved needed to have a high enough cultivation. Whatever the case, since the Inn wasn't stopping it, that meant that the force was not malicious or harmful. But it was most definitely infectious.

Even those who had no affiliation with the human race, or the Jotun empire, began to feel the feeling of expectation associated with Ragnar. He was a living legend in the empire, and over the course of his service in the army, which itself had spanned more than a thousand years, he had more than built up his reputation. He was called the Son of the Empire, for the services he had rendered to the empire went far beyond what could be expected of a soldier.

While he was handling all the various logistic problems, Lex paid close attention to not only the colosseum, but to Emperor Jotun in particular. While everyone looked out at Ragnar with expectation, only he seemed to have pity in his eyes.

Something was amiss.

But there was no time to speculate, and even if he could, Lex could not interfere in this matter. All he could do was look.

Just as calmly as Ragnar had, Warheil entered the colosseum from the opposite side. He was wearing a fitted black suit with gold embroidery. The smile on his face seemed quite genuine, and he did not seem to feel like he was going to a fight at all.

It seemed that all characters at such a level were extremely confident in themselves. No nervousness could be detected from either of the participants.

"Human, I almost pity you. In your confidence, you do not even know the mistake you have made," he said while looking at Ragnar, as if he was genuinely concerned for him.

"In my life I have made many mistakes. Confronting evil is not one of them," Ragnar replied calmly.

Warheil shook his head one more time, as if he was disappointed in him.

"Realize, child, that you have built up your legend only fighting the servants of devils, not us devils directly. It is time you learnt the difference between a master and a slave."

Without any forewarning or superfluous movements, Warheil lifted his finger and thrust it forward. The world itself seemed to end.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 720: Quick battle

One of the many excellent features of Regal Embrace was how quickly Lex could learn defensive techniques. But not only could he learn them quickly, he could analyze someone else using them as well. With this new technique Lex hoped to retain that feature, as well as gain a similar feature for offensive techniques as well, not to mention every other kind of technique that existed. One should expect this much from a superior technique, right?

Unfortunately it was not meant to be, and not only because his new foundation was not yet built. Instead of making him have the ability to instantly pick up techniques, Lex's own learning ability and analytical skills were instead greatly boosted.

Yet, as of right now, these skills had no effect on the fight Lex was watching. Not only could he not learn anything, he was absolutely lost in terms of what was happening. Warheil extended his finger, and everything seemed to end. Light faded, sounds faded, thoughts faded. There was only the finger, which moved swiftly and slammed into Ragnar's chest.

The world returned to normal, and so did Lex's thoughts. Of course, he was never truly affected as the Host Attire would prevent it, but he was allowing himself to experience as much as possible.

Ragnar was either caught unprepared, or couldn't be bothered to defend. Either way, his body was thrown back, but in slow motion, as if time itself was moving slowly around him. The thing that Lex felt was most incredible was how there was no aura of the attack at all, or any devastating repercussions. There were no sonic booms or fallout damage, and everything was contained between the two participants.

Then the fight picked up its pace, and Lex lost sight of the two. He could always watch the entire fight slowly later, as he was recording it using the Inn, but for now he just allowed him to experience how vast the difference between himself and those two was.

On the battlefield, the fight was a lot more one sided than anyone had assumed. Ragnar was on the receiving end of Warheil's savagery, and it seemed like he could do nothing to fight back.

Normally, a fight between higher level cultivators took much longer than normal, and could go from months to even years. But that did not seem to be the case here, as Ragnar's armor had already been torn off of him in the most brutal way. Ragnar's body, despite its devastated state, was not bleeding, for every single drop that escaped his body would turn to ash and fly away.

Although, to Ragnar's credit, despite being so beaten, he was still doing his best to fight back, and despite being so overwhelmed so completely, his eyes were only filled with determination, not desperation.

In front of him, Warheil looked at him with derision in his eyes. The devil wanted nothing more than to end him, but he recalled the meeting he had with Jotun. To Lex, their meeting had been so brief he could not even study their expressions, but the two had had an entire conversation during that period.

"Well, well, what do we have here? To what do I owe this pleasure, Jotun? Don't tell me you're here to plead with me to let your general live," he had said when he saw the man.

"No, I'm here to make a deal. Devils love deals, don't they?" Jotun replied placidly. He seemed to be doing a tedious chore.

"Oho, a deal with an Emperor. I'm quite excited. What do you have to offer? And what could you possibly want?"

"I know full well the power of devils, and I know an ordinary human can never overcome the difference between races. Ragnar is a very promising young lad, and I have plans for him, so I don't want to lose him yet. You let him live, and in exchange, I'll promise not to hunt you down and kill you afterwards."

"Hah! You're threatening a devil? You think that'll work? You just said you knew the difference between humans and devils."

"I said ordinarily, humans cannot overcome the difference. What about me seems ordinary to you? I might have been afraid if this were anywhere else, but inside the Origin realm, even you devils have to behave in front of me. Now you take your time and think about my offer. It's not a threat, it's a deal, and a great one, in my opinion."

The small exchange had been extremely infuriating, but at the end of the day, Jotun had the right to be arrogant. With the backing of the Henali, in the Origin realm, he really could throw his weight around. Moreover, it wasn't as if Jotun had never killed a devil before. Not to mention... Jotun's realm.

Anger filled Warheil's heart the moment he decided to let Ragnar live, so he decided to leave a curse on his body.

That split second where Warheil seemed to be lost in thought, Ragnar saw an opening and attacked with deadly decisiveness!

He swung his face with full force, holding it with both hands. The weapon did not even come close to making contact, yet Warheil's expression changed. Around them, the universe seemed to change. The colosseum disappeared, and a desolate, barren land replaced it. Clouds filled the sky, but instead of rain, chains fell down, and instead of thunder they rumbled with the clinking of metal.

The chains latched onto Warheil, locking him in place, while hands emerged from the ground and seemed to tear at the devil's soul. But before any real damage could be done, Warheil's eyes changed. From the ordinary brown colored eyes, they changed to a fiery orange while the skin around his eyes faded just a bit, revealing reddish skin.

The change was minimal, but that was all that was required for Warheil to break free forcefully from his bindings. There was no more hesitation in his actions. Warheil took a step forward, his first step during the fight and instantly reached Ragnar. With overwhelming speed and strength, he stabbed his nails into Ragnar's neck.

The stab wound was not deep, but it did not need to be. Warheil cast his curse, invading Ragnar's body. For the first time, the general felt weakness invade him, and he lost control of his body, falling limp.

The fight had not lasted long, barely a few minutes, yet a conclusion was reached. Warheil stood unharmed, with his clothes ruffled a little at most. In front of him, Ragnar lay on the ground, awake but unable to move.

A deafening hush fell over the Inn as the spectators were left shocked! Ragnar was no weakling, that much the man had proved. Yet only in a few minutes he had been reduced to this state. Warheil truly was... a devil!

"In the future, do not feel arrogant just because you acquired a little power. In the universe, you are nothing but a little bug," Warheil said with a mad grin, as if he was enjoying Ragnar's condition. Although he had left the man alive, as per the deal with the emperor, but he had also cursed him. If they did not find a way to cure him, soon Ragnar would turn into a zombie. Then, as a demon, he would be at Waheil's beck and call.

As the creator of the 'zombie' demons, Warheil had an extremely deep understanding of them, and could turn anyone into a zombie by cursing them. In fact, that was how he created the very first zombie.

As far as demons went, zombies were not the best, but Warheil had received a lot of praise from his elders for such a creation. Now, he was looking forward to acquiring a Heavenly immortal level zombie under him. After all, no one other than him knew how to cure the curse!

With a mad grin, the devil turned and left the colosseum. It was only when he turned that the crowd awakened from their stupor, and burst into cheers. Just because those from the Jotun Empire were devastated by the defeat did not mean that everyone felt the same. The devils obviously celebrated the victory, but there was no small number of beasts and even other humans who were cheering for the departing devil.

Countless cheering guests exited their rooms and swarmed onto the busy streets, nearly causing a stampede! They were yelling and screaming, and in the mood to celebrate. Meanwhile, Lex was working at full power to teleport anyone who was about to be run over by the stampede, or hurt by the celebrations anywhere.

Countless guests also disappeared, for it seemed like Warheil was hosting a party in his actual abode, to celebrate both his victory and recent breakthrough.

Comparatively, the soldiers from the empire were all filled with anger and bitter resignation. For countless years the humans had been waging war with demons, too afraid to directly confront the devils responsible. It seemed like... such a trend was destined to continue.