

## **Innkeeper 721**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 721: Audits

In the few minutes after Warheil's victory, a little over 120,000 fights broke out between overly emotional guests. Of course, they did not break out all at once, and they were of varying levels of intensity. Predictably, most of them were started or at least instigated by those who were strongly affiliated with the empire.

A majority of the fights were stopped before the first blow even landed, and each individual was fined and threatened with expulsion if they continued such behavior. Some of the fights between the stronger guests were not so easy to stop and took a couple of moments, which was enough to cause some collateral damage.

Fortunately, no one was really harmed with most of the damage being dealt to the environment. These people were all fined, as well as expelled from the Inn, with a temporary ban of one month.

On that note, Lex was extremely grateful for the ability to ban guests from coming back into the Inn. When he first started out, he had no influence on who could enter the Inn.

There was one particular fight, however, that did threaten to cause massive damage. It was one of the generals of the empire, who was unable to listen to the demeaning dribble of a gloating devil. As a Heaven immortal himself, it would have been tough to control him. Fortunately, Jotun himself put a stop to that fight before it really started.

The countless guards that had been hired once again flashed their aura for a moment to serve as a deterrent, but during such an emotional time, its effect was going to be minimal.

Many guests departed, following in the footsteps of Warheil himself, but many remained to celebrate or mourn at the Inn. Others still decided to explore the Inn a bit, as they were arriving for the first time.

But the Inn, which had the current capacity to provide services other than a simple room to a few million at most, was severely overcrowded. With no other choice, Lex had to spend billions of MP more to create more temporary cities and hire temporary workers to funnel all these guests into.

It had to be said that his very few Draconian Apostle workers, the second race of workers he had, really outdid themselves in such an environment. The more pressure they were under, the better they performed. Moreover, regardless of how hazardous he made the environment in the temporary zones, they were able to cope.

Lex had become too used to running the Inn on autopilot, but during the next two days, he barely got a moment of rest. The Inn was grossly under-prepared to handle such a huge crowd, and not just because of the size of his management team. The low cultivation levels of his workers was a fundamental problem that needed to be overcome, but could not be solved in the short term.

Almost all of his workers were at least in the Qi training realm by now, with those who had gone through at least 1 star rank change at the Foundation realm. But that was it. Almost none had yet surpassed that realm. Unbelievably, Lex was actually looking forward to the time when the Inn would stop accepting guests because he really needed some time for his staff to grow.

With most of his guests at the Golden core realm, and many more at realms even higher, he could only continue to rely on external security for now.

During this time, Lex had spent a rounded figure of 90 billion MP in making temporary cities, hiring more security, and taking care of other miscellaneous issues. The Inn had also once again run out of all the spiritual food they had grown, and so were once again serving only mortal food which the system provided, which was not appreciated by some.

But despite the heavy expenditure, he had earned 200 billion during the same time! That meant, after deducting his expenses, Lex made 110 billion MP! That was not even counting the rent MP he made on the first day.

It was finally on the third day that the number of guests finally dropped below 500 million, and Lex was able to relax. Instead of going to his office, or even meditation room, Lex found himself in his Hot tub room to unwind. He really needed it.

The first half hour, he barely even realized that he was in the hot tub. His mind was still too active, going over the various tasks he had handled the past two days. Unbelievably, besides the fight between the two heavenly immortals, the most popular thing at the Inn... had been the spaceship daycare service! He really ought to give the bunnies running that a raise or something.

But, eventually, his mind slowly relaxed and he was able to free himself from the thoughts of work. Work at the Inn never finished, and there would always be more things for him to take care of. But he had some of his own tasks to do.

Well, technically, he only needed to go get that treasure that mystery man told him about, and maybe check up on Alexander. He was somewhat curious about the details of the poisonous substance he had discovered. If it had made him sick just by being exposed to the air around it, after it was already sealed, he could not even imagine how dangerous it really was.

There was also that event hosted by Vera coming up, the one meant for prophets and oracles, but he did not expect that to be a problem, since he had handled bigger events before.

If only he knew that even as he sat there, relaxing, countless oracles were traveling to the Origin realm from other realms, just because that was where the golden keys to the Inn were available.

After Lex finally felt like he had recovered mentally somewhat, he left the hot tub and went to cultivate. He had already missed two days due to how busy things were, he could not miss another day just because he felt tired.

He continued to absorb the various materials he had gathered, upgrading his foundation bit by bit. Even if he spent hours doing this, when he could actually feel himself growing stronger, Lex never tired of cultivation.

Once he was done, Lex finally went to bed. Although at his level the need for sleep was greatly diminished, after such hectic days all without any rest, even he needed a nap.

When he woke up, he checked the Inn to make sure all was well. Things were not perfect, as he still had around 400 million guests, way too many for the Inn's capacity, but the temporary cities were keeping things running for now.

Since there was no emergency, he decided to head out. Before he returned to X-142, though, he decided to check up on Polebitvy once. It had been a while since Alexander communicated with him, so he wanted to check up on things.

He teleported to the planet, reappearing in the wilderness where he previously left from. A scan of the area with his spirit sense revealed that he was alone, so he tried to contact Alexander through the local equivalent of a phone, something he had kept in his spatial bangle, but discovered that he could not connect.

Lex frowned. This was not earth, and the technology he was using was supposed to not experience any issues like 'connectivity problems'. Something was amiss.

Since his instincts weren't warning him of any danger nearby, Lex decided to first investigate the fort he was previously staying at. Maybe he could learn something over there. Not to mention, he still had not investigated if the local rebel leader was cooperating with the terrorists Alexander was after.

He was not worried his previous identity would suffer any extra suspicion, for he really hadn't done anything or appeared anywhere else on the planet. Even if they tried to investigate him, the rebels would not get anywhere.

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Elsewhere on Polebitvy, two men casually walked around as if the planet was not at war. In that respect, they behaved much like Lex. Yet there was also a difference between them. When the two walked through crowded streets or passed by other people, no one seemed to notice them.

One of the men was holding a clipboard and was taking note of various things. But what was strange was that he did not seem to be observing the people or the buildings. In fact, none of his observations seemed to have anything to do with the locals. Instead, he seemed to be observing the flow of energy and its density, among other things.

"Auditor Ripley, as you can see, the Henali have been very careful in maintaining an organic growth of this realm. There are strict laws to ensure the realm grows under the best of conditions."

"Be that as it may, a few anomalies have been detected as of late in this realm. Although I do not doubt you, monsieur Hennessey, or the Henali, the Versalis bank has protocols that need to be followed. But do not fret, the Henali have a stellar reputation. I have no doubt that there won't be anything amiss for me to report."

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 722: Parents trap

John, an old member of the Inn and the local assassin who had not gone assassinating for a very long time, finally reappeared at the Midnight Inn. After months, he had finally won his life or death duel, yet he did not look even remotely happy - but one would have to look past his bloody figure to notice his expression.

His right arm, which he had used to deliver his final blow, had been completely eviscerated, and ended in a stump right above his elbow. While he was missing no other limbs, that did not mean he was unhurt.

Typically, as an immortal, he would have a very strong healing ability, and would not have to go to a common place like the Recovery room, but that is exactly what he did. Or at least tried to do, for his feeble body was completely lacking the once devastating strength it had.

But all was not lost. A member of the security team suddenly appeared next to him, and teleported him right to the Recovery room without asking any questions.

As John's bleeding and battered body was carried in, there was only one injury John was worried about, and that was the injury to his system! He was not sure how it happened, or what his opponent had done, but his system had completely stopped working, and with it the cultivation it had granted John had vanished too. In John's eyes, there was only a hopeless desperation.

As unusual as it was, as one 'immortal' was being taken to the Recovery room, another one was walking out. Ragnar bore no sign of the devastating loss he had suffered, and had healed completely as one would actually expect of an immortal. But just as he was not frustrated or disappointed by his loss, he was not excited about his recovery.

With an even pace, he walked to the Chamber of Secrets, where Emperor Jotun was waiting for him.

"How is everything?" the emperor asked, his voice devoid of an urgency or concern as well.

"As you speculated, Warheil cursed my body. If it is not removed, I will likely turn into a zombie," Ragnar said as calmly as if he was speaking of the weather.

"I'm sorry you had to bear this loss," the emperor said with some genuine emotion in his voice, finally. "But this is much too important. With a curse directly from the source, and one powerful enough to affect an immortal, we can finally find a way to reverse it."

"Just don't fail... again" a third voice interrupted the two. They looked over to find a female zombie avidly reading a book. Gladius, the owner of the book club taking place at the Inn, had finally given her the correct book to read. Reading a novel really was more interesting than plumbing manuals.

She should have reached such a conclusion on her own, but such basic common sense sometimes eluded her now that she had become a zombie.

"Ragnar, I'd like you to meet my daughter, Clarissa Jotun. Like you, she too suffered from a curse that eventually turned her into a zombie. Yet her curse was not from the source, Warheil. So while studying it and attempting to reverse it allowed Clarissa to retain her soul and consciousness, it did not stop the transformation. But we learnt a lot during her transformation. I'm completely confident that now, with your help, and with the information we gathered from her, we will be able to finally find a cure."

"For the betterment of humanity, I do not mind bearing the humiliation of defeat and the threat of a curse. I look forward to ridding the universe of zombies once and for all."

For a moment, Clarissa paused, and looked up at Ragnar. She could not help but admire how good he looked... then she looked down again. Suppressing her urge to eat living cultivators was hard sometimes.

While externally he did not show it, internally, Jotun was quite pleased. While his intention to find a cure for the zombie curse was real, his main motive was to get Ragnar and Clarissa to spend more time together. This is what he called... a parents trap!

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Alexander had a grim look on his face as he stared directly at a number of his superiors, as well as the head of his team, Valkyrie. He was under a lot of pressure, but at the same time, he was completely relaxed for he knew what lines he would not cross.

In this interrogation, where he was the one being interrogated, he had been searched and deprived of all his golden keys as well as other treasures. It was so that he would not try and escape to the Inn or cause any problems. Yet they overlooked the fact that he was above level 2 Prestige membership at the Midnight Inn. That meant once every ten years, he could directly teleport to the Inn without the need for a key! To be clear, this was a separate privilege from the one he used to teleport to Vegus Minima, which was the perk he got for being at level 3.

"Like I said, I cannot, nor will I, reveal the identity of my agent. Yet I can guarantee that he was not the one who planted the hazardous material."

"According to the cover identity you created, your 'agent' is only in the Golden core realm? How can he possibly survive and even come back well enough to give a report when none of our agents have survived even coming close? It took immortal level involvement to deduce that there is some extremely hazardous material hidden at the designated site, and even then it was not a clear answer. How can a Golden Core cultivator survive where even an immortal did not succeed?"

Alexander sighed. He did not blame them for being suspicious, but by grilling him they were just wasting time. It would have been better spent trying to identify whatever that material really was. At the same time, a part of him really could not help but applaud Lex for surviving when literally everyone else who came close died. It was an incredible feat.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 723: All is well, until it isn't

It did not take long for Lex to find his way to the fort which was acting as a refugee camp. He was half expecting to find it destroyed, and the surrounding region embodied in war. After all, when did he ever encounter things that were simple? Moreover, with Alexander's long silence, and his communication device not working, a full planetwide war was only the natural assumption one would make, right?

As it were, no such event was taking place. The fort was operating as usual, and when he tried to enter he was given no extra attention. After all, his casual attitude and overall 'clean' appearance had attracted enough attention last time to make an impression.

He was not even secretly followed as he entered the fort! Spreading his spirit sense carefully, he listened in on the conversations taking place around him to see what the current situation was.

The situation was not exactly ideal as there was still a war going on, but there was nothing out of the ordinary. Fernando, the rebel leader Alexander wanted investigated, had once again led a very successful strike against one of the local garrisons, strengthening their own position while weakening the official governments.

While he was here, Lex considered trying the investigation again. Sure, his 'stealthy' suit that he had manufactured after his defensive suit on its own probably wouldn't hide him from high leveled cultivators, but he was willing to give it a try. Learning a proper stealth technique was still on his agenda.

He decided to try and investigate the very same night. He was also curious to see if the rebels knew about the hidden dangers under their walls. Maybe it was a failsafe they planned in case the fort was ever taken over.

He returned to the same tavern he was staying at earlier, and decided to get some food while he waited.

Lex appeared completely casual, as if he was still getting used to his new realm and had no intention of getting involved with the war. He saw a few familiar faces from when he had previously stayed there, and began catching up with them. Keeping up his covers' identity and relations as important, as he never knew when they could come in handy.

A few hours later, as evening was coming to a close, Lex was sitting at a table with a group of locals, playing a card game. It was both entertaining and relaxing, and could be considered 'work' at the same time. How ideal was that?

All was normal, until Lex felt something strange. It was not just his instincts that picked up an anomaly, but the very energy within him.

The new nameless cultivation technique had explained his existing affinity to him, so he now knew that besides an affinity for 'space' he could interact with laws in general as well. That did not mean he had an affinity for all laws, just that he gained the ability to somewhat interact with them. This in itself was a tremendous ability, as it was something he should not have attained until he became an actual immortal. At the same time, what he could do with it was also very limited and situational.

But, as it happened, Lex encountered just such a situation where his affinity was triggered. Laws were not rare, and existed across every inch of the universe, as far as Lex understood it. He was not too clear about when or how he would be able to interact with laws, but it was definitely not with the laws embedded in the fibers of the universe he encountered everyday.

Yet at that moment, he encountered an anomaly in the laws surrounding where he was. It was that disturbance he felt, using his affinity, that was weakly triggering his instincts.

He looked across the tavern towards one of the walls. Nothing special seemed to be happening there, but as it happened, behind the wall in that very direction a short distance away, two men appeared.

One of them was holding a clipboard, and taking notes, while the other was smiling and pleasantly chatting with the man. They were not doing anything unusual, and Lex could not detect them entirely either.

But his instincts were definitely picking up something, and the feeling was quite ominous. He frowned, and put down his cards. At the table, everyone turned to look at him, curious about what he was doing, but Lex could not be bothered.

"Something is wrong," he warned softly, before quickly departing. The feedback from his instincts was unusual and he could not decide if it was danger or something else he was sensing. He decided to investigate carefully.

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In space, above the planet Polebitvy, Jeffery was standing inside a small, invisible ship. He was smiling widely as he looked down on the planet, and whatever he saw made him feel even happier. He wanted to smile even wider, but he physically was limited from doing it!

Suddenly his face distorted, and the grin became even wider as his lips fell off his face. But instantly he returned back to normal, and began patting his face, making sure it was okay.

He couldn't give up his identity as a human just yet, and it took quite a bit of effort every time he disguised himself, so he had to restrain himself.

"Ah, the hubris of the powerful. I love taking advantage of it," he spoke to no one in particular. Then, with a look of reluctance, he turned away. As much as he wanted to continue watching, things were about to get heated. He had to leave this galaxy before someone tracked him down.

"The VIPs are in place. Deliver the welcome present," he continued to speak, though no one else was on the ship with him.

A few minutes later, the ship teleported far away. At the same time, one of the barrels of Void wood hidden under the fort wall cracked.

"Holy shit!" Lex could not help but curse as his instincts screamed death. Teleporting back to the Inn, ironically, was not quick enough since his return was always slower than that of guests. Using his complete strength, and then some, Lex bolted in the opposite direction of the wall.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 724: Eco-terrorists

There was no explosion. There was no eruption force that could tear open the earth under which the barrels were buried, and there was no clap of thunder to warn those in the vicinity of the impending danger. Yet the danger was still there, and arguably even more lethal than an explosion.

Lex's abrupt escape immediately attracted attention, and all the guards and soldiers immediately focused on him, as if he were some criminal. As soon as he moved, some of the soldiers began moving to intercept him, but was Lex someone easily cornered?

Earlier, he would have relied only on his instincts to guide him, but in this moment, where his body was strained to the maximum amount for survival, he began to notice all the new changes in him.

Regal Embrace was about defense, and Mo's Blessing about offense. Lex decided that he wanted to surpass both, but his cultivation technique interpreted the intent behind his words, and not the words literally. After all, there was a lot more to cultivation than just those two facets, and his technique began

enhancing all of them! It was just that, since the changes had only just begun, and there was no opportunity yet, he had not noticed them before.

With his senses strained to their utmost, he noticed the movement patterns of the soldiers just as his instincts began warning him.

He saw where and how the soldiers would block him, even as his instincts began guiding him in a certain direction. Instantly, and for the first time, he realized the flaw his instincts had. Their guidance, while correct, was generic. Comparatively, when he detected all the changes himself, realized the patterns of their movement and analyzed the countermeasures himself, he reached the conclusion that the guidance of his instincts, while correct, were not the most efficient path he could take.

But at the moment, Lex did not have the time to dwell on these things. The sensation of danger he was feeling was getting even stronger, and in fact he could already detect a familiar itch filling his lungs.

He kept running, but before the soldiers could intercept him, he completed the technique In-Law effect, and teleported as far away as possible. Even while teleporting, he did not lose his momentum, and immediately crashed into the side of a hill once he reappeared.

Using only one second, Lex reoriented himself and understood his surroundings while he forced himself to cough until he spewed out some blood tinged with something green. But once the second was over, he continued to teleport. The feeling of danger was still strong!

Back at the fort, the soldiers were alarmed by Lex's immediate disappearance. Within the fort, teleportation was supposed to be blocked, unless through the official teleportation formation. Something had definitely happened!

But what they had not realized was that since the issue was not caused by Lex, but had occurred at the fort wall. When the barrel made from void wood cracked, a green sludge had leaked out. Immediately the earth itself around the barrel began turning to ash, and ultimately the wall as well. The formation lines, which were protected by the sturdy wall, naturally were also eroded, disrupting the formation.

This disruption had only taken a moment, and as it happened Lex had teleported away the very moment it happened. Yet as quick as the erosion that was taking place was, its speed was only growing as more

and more barrels cracked. The green sludge continued to spread, but the effects had already begun to influence far off places.

The refugees and citizens in the fort began to collapse where they stood, one after another. The soldiers realized something was amiss, and immediately deployed their defensive techniques. Poisons and bioweapons were nothing to, even to the cultivation world. But it was all for naught, for their demise was only delayed by a fraction of a second.

The auditor and his escort were perhaps the only ones who detected the threat at the same time as Lex, and their reaction had been exactly the same. Horrified, they teleported far away before they turned to look in the direction of the fort.

"What in heaven's name was that?" asked Hennessey, though he did not let his shock slow his actions. Even before he asked, he had already activated a distress signal, and not one meant to seek help from the Jotun empire, no. As a follower of the Henali, his distress signal targeted them directly! Jotun himself might also detect the signal, if he were in the region, but no one else.

"It's Jah'Hah liquid from the Jah'Hel bog realm," the auditor said with a look of disgust and fear. "It's extremely corrosive to any and every realm besides its own. If it's not contained quickly, let alone this planet, this whole star region will be affected. If things develop towards the extreme then the energy development of the entire galaxy will be compromised."

Both Ripley and Hennessey wore looks of disgust, both for very different reasons. Ripley turned and began noting something down on the document attached to his clipboard.

"I'm afraid you have an eco-terrorist problem. Something like this cannot be smuggled in lightly, or by the uninformed. This is no accident. I need to report this to my manager."

Before Hennessey could respond, another figure appeared in front of both of them. The figure was shrouded, so his appearance was hidden, and had no aura at all. Yet neither of them doubted the ability of whoever responded to the distress signal.

"What's the problem?" he asked, his voice echoing in their minds.

"We need to isolate the hazardous material on that planet and prevent its spread. We also need a follow up team to investigate the source of this. Whatever has happened here... and how we handle the situation will be reported by auditor Ripley to the Versalis bank."

The figure was startled at the mention of the bank and turned to look at the auditor. Suddenly the figure launched his aura in full, and overwhelmed the duo with his presence as a Dao Lord!

"You had some remaining contamination on you," the figure mentioned, before disappearing. The barrels of Jah'Hah that had exploded under the fortress, as well as countless other locations on the planet, all suddenly vanished. Although the liquid barely had a few minutes to corrode the planet, its effects were irreversible. Millions were already dead, with hundreds of millions likely to soon follow, not to mention how the environment on the planet would soon deteriorate.

"Contact the local authority," the figure said to Hennessey when it reappeared. "The natives of the planet will need to be evacuated. This planet will not recover."

Both Ripley and Hennessey were surprised to hear the news. It had been a few minutes, at most. Wasn't that reaction too strong?

As if anticipating their curiosity, the figure continued, "the space in the region has been severely compromised. While the corrosive damage from the liquid can be fixed, the damage it did to the space around the planet... can only heal naturally over time. This location has become vulnerable."

As if to emphasize what the figure said, a small portal was ripped open on the planet. A horde of insect-like creatures began to pour out from the portal with no indication that they would stop any time soon. All three of them watched from a distance, since with their cultivation realm it was quite easy to notice such a significant event even from a distance.

"Encountering a wild Minor realm with hostile creatures so soon after such an incident... I suspect your eco-terrorists had planned this in advance. If you'll excuse me, I have to make an emergency report as per bank protocol, but I'll stay here to watch as the situation develops. Please, do not let my presence distract you from your duties."

Immediately after speaking, Ripley activated a treasure which enveloped him in an opaque shield.

Hennessey grimaced upon hearing such news, and activated an emergency contact device of his own. The Henali... will not be pleased. The situation in the Origin realm was about to undergo a massive shake up.

Back down on the planet, Lex finally stopped teleporting as soon as instincts had suddenly stopped screaming at him. He had not been able to sense the interference of the Dao Lord despite his affinity of laws, yet he could definitely detect that the immediate danger had vanished.

Yet now, a new yet familiar danger had replaced it, though this one Lex completely disregarded. He wanted to teleport right back to the Inn and avoid this mess, but at the same time he did not want to abandon Alexander. He made a fist and punched himself in the gut once, causing him to vomit out some putrid, green liquid that had gathered in his stomach.

Instantly, he felt a lot better, yet weaker at the same time.

If whatever the hell that green stuff had affected him so severely, he did not need to imagine what had happened to the others. Chances were, Alexander himself might not have survived if he was exposed to it as well.

He decided... to go back to the Jotun stronghold and check it out. If the situation got worse, he could always retreat back to the Inn.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 725: Familiar

Although the sense of danger had vanished, Lex avoided the fort and instead took a long way around towards the Jotun stronghold. The trip would have taken him many hours had he not decided to pull out the 'ship' he had bought to traverse the Crystal realm.

But even then his return was nowhere near quick, and yet he found Polebitvy to be uncharacteristically silent. Even if he was out in the wilderness, far away from any habitation by rebel or local forces, one could usually at least hear the sounds of birds and insects, not to mention the various wild beasts. Yet now, the sound to keep Lex company was that of the wind, and literally only just the wind.

Even the usual rustling of the leaves was absent, for all the leaves of any trees Lex crossed had vanished and turned to ash. The wood and bark of the trees, for some reason, remained unharmed, but it was all too easy to determine that there was no longer any life within them.

The once colorful and pleasant scenery had suddenly become barren and desolate. Where once the craters caused by the war had been filled with bushes and wild grass, they were now once again empty of all but ash. It was as if the battle that had caused these craters had just ended moments ago.

The eerie thing was, Lex did not even encounter any corpses. If all the wildlife had suddenly died, infected by whatever that green poison really was, there should at least be corpses lying around. Perhaps, in some way, that would have been less creepy than the sudden absence of all living creatures.

Such a commute continued for a short while but Lex, who was paying close attention for any kind of disturbance at all, suddenly detected tremors coming from his left. Due to how sensitive the situation was, Lex did not hesitate to activate his Fancy Contact lenses before turning his ship in the same direction.

It was not easy to see far, due to the hilly terrain, but Lex soon heard the very familiar sounds of combat. From the distance he could hear the thundering of countless feet, as if from a marching army, accompanied by the frequent sound of thrashing and banging. Soon, he could hear the sound of a few explosions.

He changed into his suit with ridiculously high defense and readied himself for anything as he approached the sounds of combat. His spirit senses 'saw' the scene long before he peaked the summit of the nearest hill, revealing to him a small horde of strange gray insects.

The insects were around three feet (0.9 meters) long and had two large claws extending forward, which they used for locomotion, as they seemed to lack any other limbs dedicated for movement.

The claws were also incredibly sharp and hard, which allowed them to use it for combat as well. The few thousand insects that Lex saw had surrounded a small battered group of humans who were fighting for dear life.

Just as Lex readied himself to help, he finally reached the peak which allowed him to see the battle happening below, and his face immediately distorted. Since he was not completely used to his spirit sense, he had failed to make one important distinction.

The group of humans were, in fact, a group of kids, surrounded and protected by other civilians. Despite their somewhat decent cultivation realm, none beside them looked like they knew how to fight save one woman who was cutting through the insects like a storm.

Lex had no hesitation as he immediately used Imperial Shield and surrounded the struggling group with a number of, well, shields. The insects were not too strong, with most at the Foundation realm and only a few in the Golden core, so he was not worried at all about if they could break his barriers, and instead focused on eradicating them.

Taking advantage of his height, Lex leaped forward while he used an array to summon fire around him, and fell into the horde like a meteor! The ground trembled as he fell, and the fire swept over the insects, burning them to a crisp.

Yet compared to the massive horde, Lex had only removed but a single drop in the ocean. Undeterred, he cut through the horde, using his brute strength to absolutely crush anything that came in his way. The first punch he threw was slightly stiff, and had the form one could expect of someone who practiced in front of a mirror.

Yet Lex seemed to gain a deeper understanding of his body, as well as the structure of the insect he punched, and immediately adapted. The second punch he threw, this time with his left hand as it was following up the one from his right, had the form and fluidity of an amateur boxer. Moreover, although his strength did not require such precision, his punch landed at the insects most vulnerable point, immediately crushing its spine.

Lex suddenly seemed to learn something new once again, this time about how his weight distribution affected his form. Weighing at 712 pounds (325 kgs), it was no wonder his weight affected him.

He took a step forward, as he naturally had to progress, yet somehow his posture became perfect for his third punch. This time around, it looked like the blow had been delivered by a professional fighter, and killed the insect without crushing its body. No extra strength had been used at all.

As he took another step forward, he did not punch, but swept his foot around and hit countless insects that had closed up on him. When he finally threw his fourth punch, he no longer looked like a professional, but like a champion who had dominated the ring his entire career.

With each step he was taking, Lex was undergoing an evolution in his understanding of combat, and his aura was undergoing a subtle change.

Yet all of this was happening subconsciously, as his actual entire focus was on reaching the kids as quickly as possible. Even though they were safe, there was no need for them to remain in such an anxiety inducing environment.

As soon as he reached the barrier, he threw in a bundle of golden keys, and merely screamed "crush them!"

Whether it was because of the impression he made with his arrival, descending from the heavens in a literal ball of fire, or his dominating aura, or the ruthless efficiency with which he was killing insects, no one asked any questions nor did they ponder over his motives. Without a single thought, they crushed the keys as if listening to Lex was a habit they had long since cultivated.

Soon, the entire crowd disappeared, yet Lex did not fail to notice the corpses which were left behind on the ground, even within Lex's erected barriers. Many of the civilians who had been fighting the insects had bled out and died, even after Lex had separated them from the fight.

Yet now was not the time to feel sentimental. He recalled there was still one real fighter, doing her best against thousands of insects, fighting for a hope of salvation that seemed too much of a fairytale to actually believe in.

He swept his spirit sense and found her shortly after. He moved towards her with urgency, not because the insects were a threat to him - no, even if he stood absolutely still it would be a wonder if they could harm him - no, he did not want another person to fall while he was still there to help, especially a woman so valiant.

With ever increasing ferocity, Lex fought against the invading cretins and finally reached her, yet the moment he saw her a sense of familiarity hit him and he recognized who it was. Previously, when he had arrived at the fort, he had crossed paths with an unusual woman who seemed familiar to him, but he

could not recognize. This solo warrior was the very same woman. But although he remembered where he saw her last, that is not why he felt like he recognized her. Instead, it was the way she fought that gave him a flashback, and momentarily halted his movements.

He recalled a stage and people watching, mesmerized. He recalled gorgeous phoenix eyes, filled with energy and zeal. He recalled thin pink lips which curved into an excited and innocent smile. He recalled a sleek jaw and smooth cheeks that looked like they were carved out of the purest marble, rather than belonging to a real human. He recalled flowing brown hair, even though a ballerina should never have openly flowing hair.

Her graceful yet unique movements gave her away. She was the soldier who had once performed a ballet during the Midnight Games cultural show.

Yet the reason why she seemed familiar, but Lex could not recognize her, was simply because she must have used Clark Kent glasses to hide her identity inside the Inn! Yet as the owner of the Inn, he had still been exposed to her real aura, which is why she felt so familiar, yet he could not recognize her.

More importantly, while her alternate appearance had looked so breathtakingly beautiful... her actual appearance was, as expected, not the same at all!

Now that he had uncovered why he felt like the woman was so familiar, but could not recognize her, he felt a little annoyed that the reason behind the mystery was so simple yet so stupid.

"I've already teleported the group away, there's no need to continue fighting," Lex told the woman through his spirit sense. "You should hurry up and retreat as well, there's no point in continuing to fight."

He also handed her a golden key, in case she didn't have one. Although there was no white horse nearby, Lex did feel like a knight in shining armor. If Fenrir were nearby, he supposed a wolf could have replaced the roll of the horse.

"I can't," was all she responded.

The Innkeeper

## Chapter 726: Teamwork makes the dream work

Lex was not expecting such a response, especially in the midst of such a large crowd of monstrous insects. It was one thing for him to remain nonchalant surrounded by a few thousand blood hungry vermin, but it was quite another case for other people.

Even if he were not wearing his defensive suit, his body in itself was nothing shy of a tank, yet the ballerina before him, despite being well equipped, was not nearly in the same league. Though admittedly, her movements were phenomenal, and she had yet to suffer a single injury, it was not really enough of an excuse to ignore a safe retreat.

In the midst of battle was not really an ideal time to converse, so Lex moved closer so that he could envelope both in his shields. Under normal circumstances, relocating when being assaulted from every angle was not an easy feat that one could just accomplish because he wanted to. Lex was effectively fighting against the force of a stampede when he moved through his foes, but he had enough physical strength to back him up, not to mention his ever increasing deftness in battle.

Although the situation did not really call for it, he could not help but enjoy the new sensation that he was feeling during combat. But at the same time, he could feel his improvements slowing down. There was only so much pressure this particular horde could give him, and if he wanted to continue to improve he would need to find a bigger or stronger horde.

But unlike Lex, who had all these advantages stacked up for him, the ballerina seemed to use nothing but absolute skill to allow her movement through the insect army. The flow of her movements never stopped, and each lift of the leg or wave of the hand hid a lethal intention behind it. With efficiency far greater than Lex himself, she was leaving behind insect corpses, though admittedly Lex was not really trying.

Lex could not help but compare her current appearance to the one he had seen at the Inn. The hair was the most prominent. Back then, it had been a deep brown, evoking nostalgic feelings such as hot chocolate during winter, the smell of pine wood, a warm crackling fire over freshly chopped logs and more.

Yet now, in comparison, her fiery red hair lit his mind ablaze as if it was tinder, awaiting a lit match. The way it flowed in the air, free and wild, filled him with a feeling of excitement and energy, like he had adrenaline coursing through his veins and he needed to seize the day.

Her skin had been flawless and fair, like a marble statue of a goddess. Now, however, she had freckles on her cheekbones, though admittedly they had a charm of their own, albeit quite different from the regal and distant impression she had given previously.

Her phoenix eyes had been tiny and cute, yet filled with boundless excitement. Now, she had lost that feature, and had large green eyes, though somehow larger eyes suited the boundless emotions they stored.

Her lips...

Lex snapped himself awake from his random thoughts. Was this really the time and place to be ogling a random woman? He felt slightly embarrassed. It was not as if he had never seen a beautiful woman before.

Anita, the lich that worked for him at the Inn, was nothing short of breathtaking herself, breaking all stereotypes for the undead. Moreover, Zuri Adisa, the four leaf clover that had ultimately become a big shot in the Origin realm, also had a humanoid appearance that was nothing short of absolutely legendary.

With a clear mind, he finally reached her and immediately put up several Imperial Shields around the two of them so that they could talk without interference.

The abrupt emergence of a barrier disrupted the ballerina's flow for just a moment, but she recovered instantly and took a step back to analyze the situation. Upon realizing that the insects could not break the shields, she finally turned towards Lex.

"Is there something else you need to do?" Lex asked, guessing the only possible reason he could think of for why someone would reject safety.

"There are a couple of kids I was taking care of. I left them in the Jotun stronghold. I cannot leave without them, and if there's anywhere on this planet that's safe, it's there. Once I regroup with them, if the situation looks bad, I will consider retreating to the Midnight Inn."

Although Lex did not mention the Inn, upon looking at the key Lex gave her, she knew exactly where he had meant to send her.

"Do you know what's happening? These insects don't look native to this planet. Don't tell me that they were unleashed to attack the rebels?"

Although Lex did not want to believe that any government would use such a genocidal tactic to eliminate resistance, he knew full well the lengths that people would go to, to get what they wanted.

"What happened... we can probably only discover at the stronghold. All communication lines are down, even the emergency broadcast networks, so something pretty major happened. I don't see how the rebel or official forces could build up the courage to affect official Jotun networks, something else must be happening."

The woman paused her answer, and took a look at Lex top to bottom. A man fully suited looked incredibly out of place on the battlefield, especially when the suit remained creaseless even after a fight. He seemed strong, and though she had not paid attention to him too much, the barriers he put up were at least useful.

"What about you? Are you on a rescue mission, or was this something you just encountered as you passed by?"

"There was an attack of some kind on the nearby rebel fort, and it was not something I would expect in a conflict of this scale. Something, or someone, has definitely interfered. I was also heading towards the Jotun stronghold to find out what was happening."

The two did not explicitly state it, but seeing as how their objectives aligned, they seemed to reach an agreement to work together.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 727: Consecutive coincidences

"My name is Lex," he introduced himself, since they were going to be working together.

"Gisele," she responded succinctly.

Lex only nodded, and then turned to look at the endless little critters trying to get to them.

"Give me a moment," Lex said, before he began forming an array. Comfortably secure behind his shields, Lex took his time to build a strong array capable of dealing area damage.

The lack of pressure allowed him to comfortably pursue his repertoire of premade arrays, and choose the most suitable one.

When he finally unleashed it, an orangish red flame rained down from the sky, burning all the insects it touched. Among the arrays Lex had prepared, this was not the strongest, but it was one of the ones with the largest reach. He was not really interested in killing all the insects originally, and planned on leaving. But Gisele's fiery red hair reminded him of it, not to mention that these insects could go and attack other helpless humans or any survivors of the strange green poison. It was best to get rid of as many of them as possible, so long as they did not delay him too long.

Most of the Foundation realm insects burnt to a crisp, though the Golden core ones were only wounded. But, unfortunately for them, using an array took no energy from Lex, so as long as he was uninterrupted, he could use it as many times as he wanted.

One wave, two waves, a dozen waves of flames fell from the skies until all the insects were burnt into fiery crisp, or into glowing charcoal. It only took a few minutes of his time. The reason Lex had not done this from the get go was that he did not want to take risks with the survivors.

"Let's go," he said calmly, as he proceeded towards his ship. Gisele remained silent as well, giving no indication of whether she found the feat impressive or not.

They set off as soon as they got in the ship, silence fell between them. Just because Lex had focused a little more than usual on Gisele's appearance did not mean he had a crush on her, or wanted to get closer to her in any way.

His focus remained on any other signs of life as they traversed the hilly terrain, yet all of it remained so barren. When all this was happening, Lex had been too busy trying to get as far away from the poison

until he found a location safe enough to teleport away from. As such, although he caught glimpses of the eroding environment, he had not paid it too much mind.

Gisele, on the other hand, not only had no idea of what had happened, she was completely bewildered as the environment around her started to decay. As if that was not enough, she was soon after attacked by a horde of never before seen insects.

The day was quite eventful, to say the least. This was not even mentioning how she was suddenly feeling ill, though fortunately whatever was making her sick disappeared just as abruptly as it had arrived.

A short while later, they finally crossed the border between the rebel held area. Taking a detour around the fort took some time, but Lex was not willing to risk getting close to it. He did not believe that there were no traces of that poison left in that area.

"We're almost there," Lex declared, surprised that their trip had been uninterrupted by any other significant event. It seemed like they truly were traveling on a barren planet.

"Although there weren't so many people around when I crossed last time, it really wasn't this empty. I suppose everyone retreated to the stronghold," said Lex absently, not really expecting a response.

"A lot of people died very suddenly... and whoever died turned to ash, leaving no trace of their bodies. The same happened to all the beasts."

"What?" Lex asked, startled.

Before Gisele could clarify what she meant, a few things distracted him. First, Mary reached out to him.

"Lex, I thought you should know, a group of kids and civilians arrived at the Inn a short while ago. They were all wounded and so were being treated, but we've just discovered an extremely potent poison in their bodies. Even the Recovery Pod cannot heal them, and will at most slow things down. If nothing is done, they're going to die."

The news was quite alarming, as it meant even people who had survived the initial spread of the poison may end up dying.

But before Lex could process the news, or even check up on his new companion, he felt a strange fluctuation in space.

Overhead, a tear opened up in space itself, and insects began raining down from the sky. Only, these ones weren't as weak as the ones Lex encountered before. The weakest ones were at the Golden core realm, while a majority were at the Nascent realm. Based on this trend... there was even a chance for there to be some immortals!

"If there are immortals, we won't be able to cross so easily. Be ready to retreat to the Inn," Lex said seriously, his gaze fixed on the insect rain.

"No, I can't afford to leave the kids behind! If the situation gets bad, you can leave without me. I'll find my way across."

Lex snapped his neck back to look at her and see whether she was serious or not. He did not know if she was being stubborn, or really had something to rely on. Either way, for now at least, it seemed like he had to force his way through.

"And we were so close..." he couldn't help but mumble. One could even say that he had raised this flag himself by acknowledging how easy his journey had been, but Lex thoroughly refused to believe in flags. He would continue this behavior and prove that the continuous bouts of bad luck he encountered... were all just consecutive coincidences.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 728: No fear

As inconvenient as it was having to go through a rain of killer insects, Lex was not only going because of Gisele. He needed a cure for the poison if he was going to treat his guests, and the Jotun empire was the most likely to have one. Or at least know of one. This was completely not an excuse for him to show off in front of a pretty girl.

"You keep mentioning wanting to retreat. If you wish to head back, you can go. I can manage on my own," said Gisele. She had been using the ride to recuperate and had recovered much of her spiritual energy. This was a completely foreign concept to Lex, as he always had such massive spiritual energy reserves that he barely ever came close to depletion. If he ever did, it was mostly because of how ridiculously extreme his situation was.

"It's not me I'm worried about. I am well aware of what I can handle, but typically, going straight through thousands of enemies is reason enough to give others pause."

He looked at her to see if she reacted, but her gaze was completely fixed on her objective. Lex's mention of the number of enemies did not phase her at all.

"I can take care of myself. I am no stranger to a tough fight."

She paused for a moment, then turned to look at Lex.

"As you said, facing so many enemies is no cakewalk. Is there a particular reason why you're heading to the stronghold? If it's just curiosity about what happened, you can always find out after the fight is over."

"A strange poison was spread across Polebitvy. It even affected those that I rescued. I'm hoping the Jotun have the cure for it. After all, someone definitely acted out to stop the spread, or the damage caused would have been much worse."

As soon as he finished speaking, Lex's expression changed as he realized something.

"Wait a minute, are you also poisoned?" he asked, although he believed he already had an answer. Both times when it came to the matter of the poison, even he was affected, so how could others avoid it.

"All the more reason to reach the stronghold," Gisele said calmly, as if her words were explanation enough.

Lex shook his head disapprovingly. Exertion would most likely only make her situation worse, but if she wasn't willing to listen to reason, who was he to force her otherwise?

He, instead, turned his attention forward. The stronghold, by which he meant the small area protected by the Jotun empire, was not yet in view, but it was close.

"We cannot let them slow us down," declared Lex as his ship continued to move towards the raining insects. For a moment, he could not help thinking that he was glad that he didn't have entomophobia.

"I'm strongest at close range combat, though I can still do some damage at a distance."

"My shields don't really work well with a moving object, so they're out of the picture. As it happens, what I'm best at is also close range combat, but well, I'm sure I can manage something."

Gisele nodded and summoned a vial from a spatial equipment she had, before drinking it. Clearly she was making preparations for the fight. Lex, too, decided to prepare for the fight, so he entered his state of flow.

When he told her that what he was best at was close range combat, it wasn't wrong since he only recently improved dramatically in the field. But even so, that didn't mean he was lacking in other areas. He did not know why, but his instincts warned that it was best he keep his identity hidden while fighting, so he used Notorious Anonymity - the technique that covered his face with a particularly devilish mask.

Gisele suddenly got goosebumps and looked towards Lex. For some reason, the aura he was giving out changed, and quite dramatically. Two arrays appeared around him, one in front of each hand, and his eyes hidden behind the mask became dark.

Without Regal Embrace holding him back, it was time to let loose and see what he could really do.

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While Lex only had to face a newly forming horde, and even then he only had to cross them rather than defeat them all, the situation in the Jotun stronghold was much, much worse. Five separate tears in space surrounded the stronghold, unleashing five massive armies of the very same insects.

A massive formation protected the stronghold from the immediate threat of the horde, but it was unknown how long the formation would hold out, for five immortal insects were constantly bashing it.

The stronghold did not have many soldiers, but the few that were stationed there were all geared up and standing ready for their orders. Even facing such a tremendous force, there was not a hint of fear that tainted their resolve. If anything, a sense of excitement and anticipation filled every street and corner.

To become a Jotun soldier was not something that could be achieved by the faint of heart. Or rather, the Jotun took those weak of heart and turned them into spectacular soldiers.

The number of insects had grown so immense that no one could guess how many there truly were. They could not climb the formation, but so many of them piled up against it that they at first began to cover the sides. But slowly and steadily, as their numbers increased, they began to truly cover the entire formation, slowly and steadily blocking all the light that was entering within.

It was this scene and this environment into which Alexander stepped when he was finally released from his interrogations. Behind him six blades floated, now with the very edge of their blade glowing red.

After fighting Lex last time, he had thought of ways to increase his attacking power, and this new technique was what he came up with.

Within the center building of the stronghold, Belle, who was going by the code name Valkyrie, received an emergency call. It was her ancestor, and the founder of the Williams family.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 729: Bloody art

"Ancestor what-"

"Don't speak and just listen to me," William interrupted Belle, his mood extremely solemn. "The situation at Polebitvy is extremely dire. Not just the entire planet, but the entire star system, as well as all star systems nearby are being evacuated. In fact, the empire may even give up on the entire Pental galaxy depending on what happens next.

"What I'm about to tell you is beyond confidential, to the utmost degree, and is perhaps the most important news you will hear in your entire life."

William paused, though only for the briefest of moments, giving Belle enough time to process everything he had just said.

"The news I'm giving you is the same news I would give to any of my descendants if they were in your situation, understand? What you're about to hear is not a reward for your talent or your newfound strength, it's an opportunity independent of everything else. Whether you take it or not is up to you, and whether you survive or not is also completely up to chance."

Williams' exasperation and frustration as he said those words was quite evident, but she could not understand why. What she did understand was that she was in a situation much more serious than she had ever faced before, and perhaps it was not the time to be willful. Of course, that would never prevent her from being willful if she truly wanted to. She could not control the universe, that was something she learnt at a very early age. She could only control her own actions.

"Jeffery, the terrorist you were hunting, seems to have a much bigger background than anyone expected or anticipated. What he just pulled off at Polebitvy has interrupted plans that are billions of years in the making, and he has angered some tremendously powerful people. As we speak, almost every single powerful entity in the entire Origin realm is surely making their way to the Pental galaxy to hunt for his traces. What you have is an advantage everyone else lacks, which is that you're the closest to him.

"If you can hunt him down, whether you catch him alive or kill him, the rewards you will get surpass anything you can imagine. I'm forwarding you a live link to the same information the emperor himself is receiving at this very moment. What you do next... is completely up to you."

The call ended, and the world around Belle seemed to slow down. Although a lot of extremely critical information was shared, due to their cultivation their speed of communicating was extremely fast. Not even a complete second had passed since she picked up the call, and it had already ended.

Countless thoughts swam through her head. Her personal goals, her family's struggles, the grudges against her parents she had nursed in her heart for so many years, the fates of the soldiers under her command, the fate of her two sisters, Liz who had run away and had yet to be found and Moon who had spent most of her life imprisoned, her brother Lex who vanished off earth with no trace, and countless others. With this opportunity in front of her, she felt like her, she felt like her character was truly being tested.

After all, right at her doorstep five immortals were banging, waiting to come in and kill them all. Moreover, there was only one immortal stationed in the Jotun stronghold. Without Belle's help he probably would not survive long against five foes. That meant everyone at the stronghold would similarly die.

She closed her eyes and sighed. Since when had she cared about others? She would do whatever she wanted, as she had always done. A bright light burst out of her skin, passing through all walls and obstructions, and her aura began to rise.

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Gisele slowly lowered the sword in her hand. It seemed that she would not need it, at least for now.

Her eyes were fixed on Lex who stood at the bow of the ship, his feet planted firmly and his posture perfect, he did not seem to be fighting a dire fight, but instead orchestrating a grand work of art. A very bloody and brutal piece of art.

The arrays he used summoned countless small spikes of ice, barely as large as her finger, and that's it. The arrays did not even launch the spikes, no Lex did that personally using his spirit sense.

At first a couple, then a few, then a dozen, and then a few dozen, until it reached the point where she could no longer count, insects swarmed them to attack. Yet each insect that came close was pierced with a single ice spike, and fell to the ground. Not all insects died. Some were only crippled, while others were merely paralyzed while others still, those who were stronger, were merely wounded seriously.

He was extremely accurate in his aim, and precise in targeting only those that targeted them first. She did not know how long he could keep this up, but in her mind that was much too powerful. No one at the Golden core realm should be this good at killing, yet when she thought about it, all he really did was

use some arrays and his spirit sense. Theoretically speaking, it shouldn't even be very spirit energy intensive. Was this a display of... not being good at long range fighting?

Once, a nascent level insect seemed to have blocked the spikes and came close to attacking them. Gisele prepared to counter so that Lex could continue fighting the rest, but then Lex merely looked towards the insects, and it began screaming as if its very soul had been ripped to shreds.

In a few minutes, they passed through the insect rain and came out the other side. The experience was completely surreal, and Gisele kept looking back as if to ensure they really had managed to cross so easily.

But just as she was beginning to feel the relief of a close escape, Lex cursed.

"Crap!"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 730: A devil and an angel

Crossing the new space breach was relatively simple, as the insects had not had time to accumulate. At most, it was like crossing a thick, heavy curtain - if that curtain were made of living, smelly, disgusting insects that smelled. Lex wiped off some bloody goo from under his nose. No wonder the smell kept haunting him.

It was still dangerous and tricky, but manageable more or less due to how fast his ship was. Yet when he looked at the stronghold after crossing the 'curtain', Lex could not help but curse. There were too many insects to count, and they were beginning to cover the dome like protective formation around it, slowly covering the entire stronghold. As if that was not enough, he could feel the familiar yet intimidating aura of immortals from the insects.

"That's not good," even Gisele admitted with a frown as she noticed the siege.

Despite the situation, Lex could not help but be a bit amused. Really? The army blocking our way is bad news?

But he had the sense to not voice out his thoughts.

"Gisele, do you know anything about arrays?" Lex asked, as he thought up a plan of what to do next. The most important thing was to avoid the immortals. Everything else could be managed.

"Just the basics. I can't use arrays if that's what you mean."

"No, not that," Lex said. "Arrays, no matter how big or small, how strong or weak, are all powered by the universe. They get their energy from their environment. But the issue I'm facing... is that the energy here is really weak and unstable. My arrays are coming out a lot weaker than they're supposed to be."

Gisele raised an eyebrow. That was weak?

"The reason I'm telling you this... is because what I'm about to do next is really risky. Even if you really don't want to, I suggest you mentally prepare yourself to retreat to the Inn."

"What are you planning?"

Lex only smiled weakly, but did not answer. Some things... were best not said aloud, lest he be accused of being crazy.

In that moment, the aura of another immortal appeared, and this time behind them. It seemed like an immortal insect really had emerged from that hole in space. Guess there was no more time to look back.

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The stronghold was becoming ever darker as the soldiers waited for their orders. For now, all the combat was being done via the formation, so they need not do anything. But the moment the formation failed, or was deactivated, it would be their turn to fight.

Alexander could not help but crane his neck upward, as he looked at the remaining bit of the formation still uncovered, and at the last few rays of light still coming in. He had already sent a message to the Inn

to inform Lex not to come back to Polebitvy, at least for now. The result of the upcoming battle would determine whether Alexander would even continue hunting for the terrorists or not.

Yet just as the dome was about to completely darken, a pure, bright light emerged from the center of the stronghold, illuminating every corner.

Alexander could not help but turn back to see where the light was coming from. At first, he could not see much as the source of the light was too bright, causing him to close his eyes. But a few moments later, though the light did not dim, a figure suddenly became visible right in the center.

All anyone could see was a vague outline of a woman, and six incredible, massive wings coming out from behind her. She was rising up in the air slowly, and her aura grew more powerful as she rose higher. One could tell that she was building up her strength to release it all at once.

But before she had a chance to reach her peak strength, the sound of thunder pierced the dome, the very ground trembling from its reverberating might. The soldiers once again snapped their neck, this time towards the source of the sound.

At the base of the dome, they could see that the insects had been burnt to a crisp, and a clearing, ever so small appeared. But the clearing was too small, and the horde was quickly coming to close it. But before they could, a bolt of lightning fell from the sky, once again devastating any insects near that clearing, and releasing another thunderous roar.

For some reason, all the soldiers had the same thought, 'tribulation lightning!' But, why was it striking the ground here? Was the planet itself undergoing a tribulation?

But before their minds could wander much farther, and their imagination ran wild, a figure became visible from the clearing. On a strange ship in the shape of a canoe, a man and a woman were quickly approaching.

Even from such a distance, the devilish mask covering the man's face was visible, though the soldiers did not have time to appraise it for long. A mind rattling shriek pierced the air, and an insect struck out at them from a distance. The insect looked identical to any other, but the aura of an immortal was all too prominent to make anyone mistake it for an ordinary one.

They could only watch helplessly as the daring raid from the two stragglers was about to fail, but then something unexpected happened.

The devil lifted its hand and, with perfect timing, seemed to divert the attack just as it was about to hit them, and launched it towards the clearing! There was another thunderous roar, and this time all the insects in the path of the canoe were shredded, forming a gruesome red carpet of blood for the passage of the ship!

In that very instant, the figure in the center of light reached her peak strength, and unleashed a devastating attack that seemed to target each and every insect around the dome.

For better or worse, the battle had begun. On one side was a man akin to a devil, on another side a woman who radiated the aura of an angel, and in the middle a horde of wailing insects.