

Innkeeper 821

The Innkeeper

Chapter 821: Relaxing just a little

The next few days passed calmly for Lex. The first thing he did was plan how to get some sleep. Although he did not feel particularly tired, he was aware of the fact that his body had been under extreme stress. Not only had he not healed completely yet, but the process of removing his inscription was far from simple.

Just thinking back to the pain he felt before he blacked out made him tremble. Lex had tolerated pain before, both in his body and soul, yet that was a different experience altogether. It was as if his very being was becoming undone.

He spent some time in the Hot tub room, and even found time to go to Harry's barbershop. Yes, he did not have hair. But Harry had long transcended the simple grooming he used to do back in the day. Although, of course, if that's what a client wanted, that's what they would get.

But Harry could relieve the stress accumulated in the body, mind and soul, among other things. One of his most popular new attractions was the Soul Pond, which could sustain or heal broken souls, though admittedly its healing effects were extremely minimal. Its primary use was to nurture soul treasures, techniques, and to support soul based cultivation methods. His own Glamor Sorcery was one of the types of soul cultivation techniques.

Lex just had Harry alleviate the accumulated stress in his soul and body so that they could heal better. A part of him could tell that the shock he had experienced to remove the inscription was not simple.

After experiencing both the Hot tub and Harry's treatment, he stopped by the Patisserie where he got himself some cupcakes and hot chocolate. If there was a way to relax even more than this, he had not discovered it yet.

Once all this was done, he was finally ready to sleep. Just to be safe, he asked Mary to wake him up if he slept longer than a day.

The last thought he had right before he dozed off was how he was still using a simple bed whereas he could be using some supreme, ultra sleep treasure that created the perfect sleep environment. He did not know what it would entail, but when he thought back to all the palaces he had been visiting lately, he was willing to bet a dragon that they did not use simple beds.

Lex had not realized that a simple bed would not be able to support his considerable weight at all. During the many star level raises, all his furniture had also been nourished, and subsequently evolved.

Just as he feared, Lex had become too cozy. That, accompanied by his wounded state, led him to sleep continuously for a day. It even took Marry considerable effort to rouse him from slumber, because every time she would wake him, he would mumble 5 more minutes before dozing off again.

But he never realized that by saying that, he was literally making her wait five minutes before trying to wake him again. If he simply asked to be allowed to sleep longer, she would let things be. But since he kept asking for five minutes, she had to keep waking him every five minutes!

Eventually, a grumbling Lex got out of bed. Although he knew a day may have passed, he only felt like it had been mere minutes.

After a very large breakfast, Lex decided to check in with Vera first. If divination could really help him find Barley, it was worth a shot. Although he was fairly certain that whoever had Barley, or wherever he had escaped to, he should have taken precautions against divination by now.

Just as Lex approached Vera, who was sitting with the same group as last time, he paused. He immediately realized that everyone around Vera was staring at him with greedy eyes, as if he were a valuable treasure that they wanted to scoop up.

"You have become quite famous in our circles, Lex," Vera said with a smile. "The help you provided Leslie was unbelievable, and now the entire divination community wants to get their hands on you. Of course, the only reason they haven't is because no one can divine whether or not that's a good idea."

"Is your entire community dependent on a simple prophecy? If so, I can give you one now. If anyone tries to mess with me, not only will they not get my help, they will severely regret it."

Lex was smiling as he talked, but the weight of his words was not to be underestimated. He had not realized how a simple action could land him in trouble.

"Worry not, no one will harm you. If that were the case, I would never have publicly asked you to help out Leslie. I would have done it in secret. Since no one was able to divine anything about you, everyone came to a consensus. We'll make it official during the upcoming event, but basically, if someone wants your help they can offer you a price, but they cannot coerce you."

"You know, this is not my day job, right? I have my own things to do, not to mention helping Leslie was far from simple. My hands got burned quite badly if you recall."

"That's the whole point," Vera said giggling. "All that happened is that your hands got burned. Normally, anyone who tries to touch tribulation lightning that is trapped within someone else's soul ends up suffering from the same predicament."

Lex glared at Vera. She had not mentioned this to him before he tried, although admittedly he had not taken the request too seriously when he heard it either.

"Don't worry. It's up to you if you want to help anyone. No one will pester you if you don't want to help, although it's an easy way to make friends. Some of the people here are very well connected, it could be worth it."

Lex took in a deep breath, and tried to ignore how he was trying to be used.

"Well, if anyone wants my help, you can start by first finding Barley Holdinson for me. I wouldn't mind helping someone out after that."

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Chapter 822: Another blade

Lex did not need to explain who Barley was since finding him was one of the recent popular requests for oracles in the Origin realm, right behind finding Lex. While initially finding Barley was easy, it had been a while since he disappeared from both public view as well as from the effects of divination.

But unless he was using an abnormally powerful protection measure, such as the formation within the Inn, there would always be ways to find him. For example, most means of protection from divination only target the more common or mainstream methods.

More unique methods, such as Vera's, can often circumvent such protection measures. For example, as long as Barley met Vera in person at some point in her life, she could divine her own future and find him, or predict where and when he could be found at that time. After all, the target of her divination is herself, not him.

"I'll spread the word," Vera said, without drawing any conclusions. After all, almost everyone knew why Barley was famous, and the fact that he had mentioned a 'Lex' in his video.

"How is Leslie doing?" Lex asked, since he didn't see her in the group.

"With the lightning removed from her soul, she is doing much better. She can start divining again, but more importantly, she can start cultivating again. I can't really say you got off easy, since what you did for her was nothing short of incredible, but don't underestimate her divination. She is one of the most sought after oracles of the upcoming generation. It was actually because of that very fact that she attracted a client involved in things she was too low leveled to learn about. She won't be making that mistake again."

Listening to her words Lex frowned. Originally he had planned on spending more time getting to know the oracles, but her premonition of his deep regret left him feeling worried. She had told him the key to avoiding his regret was a blade in his possession. He had assumed that it was the blade of grass containing laws, but he also could not discount that it may very well also be the sword or 'blade' hiding within his soul.

"If anyone gets any leads on him, you can just inform someone from the Inn. They'll find me," said Lex before turning away. Since he was taking a break from absorbing the blade of grass, he might as well focus on learning sword intent.

"Mary, how is Xeons' progress studying the ships?" Lex asked. Since his mind had been diverted towards the topic of strengthening his combat ability, he may as well check up on all his projects in this field.

"He's asked for the millionth time to be allowed to dismantle the Silent Wanderer to study it, but I keep telling him no as per your instructions. He's enrolled in numerous classes on the Henali portal, but that's a gradual process and you can expect him to become an expert overnight. Especially since he's also focusing on refining his body to become a full-fledged dragon.

"He has designed a few weapons that can be attached to ships, though, again, I am not letting him experiment on the Silent Wanderer or the Flying Day care. Speaking of the Wanderer, Captain Cirk has finished going through the manual for the Silent Wanderer and is confident he can pilot it. He's been undergoing simulations in the Henali portal, but if he has an opportunity to fly the real thing, it'll be better practice."

Lex looked up and easily found the massive spaceship that was hovering right above the Inn. Lex had to buy a massive plot of land where the ship could hover over so that it doesn't block the sky for the main areas of the Inn. The plus point was that the area under the ship became a 'shadowed' area, where those guests who preferred the dark, or were sensitive to light, could reside.

"For now, I can allow him to test out some of the features of the Wanderer within the Inn. When I get the chance, I'll take him out with me so he can try flying it in space. But I don't see that happening anytime soon. How's the training for the 300 from the new battalion going?"

"It's going well, and they're growing fast. In a few years, they'll be a considerable fighting force."

"They're only the first batch. The Inn will require a lot of strong warriors, so we have to refine our training methods as we go through them. Have someone compile a report on their progress, I'll look at it later."

Lex discussed various projects with Mary, right up until he reached the Midnight mountain. To be more specific, until he reached the sword slash within the mountain. He had been here before, but at that time he was wearing the Host Attire, so he did not feel the true weight of the sword intent gathered here.

Now, standing there without any protection, he was finally exposed to it in its full glory. It was heavy, yet sharp at the same time. It was not cutting his body, but he could tell that the sharpness was imbued within the aura of this place.

To put it in other words, the way a dragon's aura contained an oppressive might, the aura here was honed like a razor. He felt like his thoughts themselves were being cut through.

This was Qawain's abode, in a sense. Qawain, the sword that had gained sentience, gave sword lessons within a small cave at the heart of the sword slash, but first you would have to cross the artificial valley that was filled with this sword intent.

Some saw this as an obstacle, but Lex, who had no experience with sword intent at all, saw this as an opportunity. He summoned a simple, double-edged sword he had bought earlier on from the Guild room and gripped it tightly.

Since he had never formed an intent before, and was not sure how to form one, he would just have to brute force it. He would experience the intent in the valley with his body, and try to recreate it on his sword.

Without any hesitation, he took his first step.

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Chapter 823: Level too low

Lex had too many concerns lately, but he put them all aside for now. With a clear, focused mind, he entered the Sword Valley, and immediately he felt the resistance of the sword intent that filled the area.

Compared to Dragons Might, which threatened to crush his body and soul and extinguish them, even this sharpness that threatened to cut his body felt like nothing. No matter what, Lex knew that within the Inn he could not be hurt by aura alone and so that element of danger vanished, regardless of how difficult it was.

Back then, in front of the dragon, if Lex had relaxed for even a second, or given up, the danger to his life was extremely real. He would have had to escape to the Inn to get away with his life intact. It was akin to the plank challenges that used to happen back on Earth, but the only difference was that if you give up, you would die.

It was like putting a gun to an ordinary person's head and asking them to plank for ten minutes. Even with all the adrenaline pumping, it was unknown if they would be able to make it. Compared to that,

regardless of how threatening this sword intent felt, it was nothing. Not to mention, even if the threat was real, Lex would not hesitate.

The information about intents flashed through Lex's mind. Before one can learn intent, they must first gain a certain level of competency in that field. Asking Lex to become a sword grandmaster overnight was too much, but he had to start with somewhere.

Lex focused on the sharp feeling that was pressing against his body, visualized it as something that was coating his own sword, and then slashed forward.

Predictably, Lex's sword was not coated in any real intent. Despite the expected result, Lex frowned. Since his mind was much sharper than before, Lex noticed a multitude of things he would have missed before. By ordinary standards, his slash was normal. It was pretty good even. But Lex noticed that as he extended his sword during his slash, his balance was somewhat impacted.

He immediately adjusted for it so that his slash was not slowed down, or so that it would not deviate from its intended target. Yet he was not satisfied by the fact that his balance was affected to begin with.

He repeated all the previous steps, visualizing the intent coating his sword, and slashed again, though this time he adjusted his footing a little beforehand so that there would be no imbalance. The slash was better, faster and delivered more power, but Lex frowned nonetheless.

The difference was practically imperceptible, yet Lex noticed anyway. Due to his readjustment of his feet, the range of his attack had been minutely reduced.

He tried again, this time keeping the desired result in mind, but then encountered a new problem.

Like this he kept trying, his initial focus on sword intent already forgotten. With each new attempt, he would take a step deeper into the valley, but the ever-increasing sword intent seemed to not bother him at all.

The issue was not that learning the sword was hard, but that Lex was too perceptive. He would detect issues with his moves that even ordinary sword masters would not be able to detect. In a sense, it could

be said that as far as the ordinary slash Lex was performing, he was already better than many sword masters. By that standard, he was already at the level to manifest sword intent.

The problem was that in Lex's mind he still had flaws in his swordsmanship, and as such would not be able to manifest sword intent. At this point, his own dissatisfaction with his level was the only thing preventing him from manifesting basic sword intent.

Deep in the valley, Qawain was watching Lex's progress with interest. Although Lex's level was abysmal, Qawain liked the standard Lex was setting, and how seriously he was taking it. After all, as a sword himself, he would definitely like those who seriously respected the sword and swordsmanship.

He was also intrigued by how Lex did not seem to be bothered by the sword intent at all. To test things out, he increased the pressure around Lex, and only Lex.

The sudden increase in pressure caused Lex's slash to falter, which made him frown again. He was not blaming the sudden increase in pressure. After all, in real combat, the situation would be dynamic. Sometimes he would face no pressure at all, and at other times, the pressure would be astronomical. Therefore, he should be able to perform in any situation.

Lex almost growled due to the immense irritation he was feeling, but then suddenly paused. His emotions were getting agitated again. He used his sword to look at his reflection and saw the faint image of a sword in his left eye. It was just as he suspected.

Lex closed his eyes and almost immediately entered a meditative state, taking deep breaths to calm himself down. He allowed his emotions to slowly fade, and pushed away all distractions. It was as if he was in the state of Flow, except that he was not becoming cold and emotionless. It was as if he was gaining all the benefits of that state without the side effects.

When he opened his eyes, Lex had calmed down completely, and renewed his focus. He slashed forth once again, this time getting much better results. He had assumed that since he had calmed down and taken control of his emotions, the sword image in his eye had vanished. But in truth, it had become even clearer once he calmed his mind. With each slash, it became clearer still, until eventually it began to shimmer.

It was as if the image was trying to manifest a sword intent of its own. Unfortunately, Lex still thought his level was too low, and so did not manifest it.

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Chapter 824: Training Schedule

Completely engrossed in the process, Lex did not feel the hours pass him by. On his own he was learning a lot, and not just about fighting with a sword. Back on Polebitvy, when he had fought off those insects, his hand to hand combat had improved tremendously fast, alongside his sense for fighting as well.

Now, with a weapon in hand, he was learning how to manage that additional weight while keeping in mind the lethality as well as limits of the weapon. After all, for his body he had an innate sense for what it could tolerate and what it could not. For a weapon, he had to keep all of those things in mind. For example, using it in certain ways would make it more prone to breaking regardless of how well crafted it was.

The combinations made available to him were also endless, so his mind was taking its time to flesh out all scenarios and thoroughly embed the knowledge in Lex's brain. Compared to learning during combat, this process was slower. After all, at that time his brain was working at maximum speed to adapt as quickly as possible. But in exchange, the depth of what he was learning was greater and more comprehensive.

Although this entire time, Lex was only practicing the same slash, without even changing the direction or starting point, his improvement in all aspects was tremendous. But considering the fact that Lex could still pick out flaws, he felt like he was still a beginner.

During this entire time, Lex only had a single thought which was ultimately unrelated to improving his technique. He admonished himself for coming into this with the mindset that it would be easy. He believed that mindset was part of the reason why he was performing poorly to begin with. He should have known that nothing worthwhile was ever easy.

But there was one thing Lex never realized during this entire process, though Qawain picked it up immediately. The sword in his eye was trying to influence him, but by refusing to manifest a sword intent, Lex was denying the sword as well. That way, all the intent the image of the sword was imparting was being absorbed by Lex, and then used to improve himself.

It formed a cycle where Lex's knowledge about sword fighting became more and more advanced, but the more advanced it became the more dissatisfied he was with himself, further pushing away the possibility of manifesting intent. After all, the frame of mind also had a lot to do with manifesting intent.

It was not as if the universe had a specific scale to judge what level was enough to manifest intent. Oftentimes, it was one's belief that they were good enough that would cause them to resonate with the laws and manifest intent, even if they did not know what they were doing. But with a diametrically opposed mindset, it was basically impossible for him to manifest it.

Qawain, being a sword himself, immediately noticed the image in Lex's eye, and realized what was happening, though he could not determine the origin of the image. But it did not matter. Lex was using his unique situation to improve, and that's all that mattered to Qawain.

Near dawn of the next day, when Lex finally reached the cave where Qawain was waiting, he was already completely mentally exhausted.

Although he was physically fine, his mind had been working overtime to detect his flaws and correct them, so by the end it was already nearing the limits of what it could do.

"You have done well," Qawain said, waking Lex from his stupor. "You have already improved a lot from when you first set foot in the valley, but there is more work that needs to be done. You have enough determination to improve, and so I do not mind teaching you. Go rest for now, and come again tomorrow. Next time there will be no intent blocking you, so you can enter directly. Tomorrow onwards, I will train you myself. Oh, of course, there is a tuition fee."

Lex nodded.

"I'll see you tomorrow."

With that, he retreated and began to make a training schedule in his mind. Every two days he would absorb a bit of the blade of grass, and in between every day he would train his sword arts. He had roughly three weeks left till the Inn was sealed, so once every week he'd go out to check if Hix had located Barley.

With that plan set in his mind, Lex finally allowed himself to get some rest. The timing was perfect, for apparently Kenta was cooking breakfast for Velma and Sohee. Joining them and watching Kenta be awkward around his wife would heal his tired mind, and relax his soul. Plus he'd get to know if Kenta was any good as a cook to begin with.

He teleported to his suite first and took a quick, yet warm shower. Although he did not sweat despite the strenuous exercise, he did not want to give Sohee any reasons to target him instead of Kenta.

Afterwards, he put on a pair of jeans and a casual T-shirt, grabbed a box of fresh Saturn cake and teleported over. He was beginning to realize that he was a fan of the cake, and not because of its psychedelic features. After all, his cultivation level was too high to be affected by it.

"Hey guys, I'm back!" said Lex loudly as he walked up to the group. They had set up a stove out in the open where Kenta was cooking as well as a picnic table nearby that was filled with pastries. In the distance there was a nice view of the Midnight Mountain, and further back in the distance, the Mountain-man. It was an excellent spot which is why he could understand why their mood was great.

But the moment he arrived he noticed that everyone immediately froze, and looked at him awkwardly.

"Hahaha Lex, my friend, I'm glad you're back. Was my father able to help you out? If not, you just let me know and I'll have words with the geezer. How dare he mistreat my good friend?"

Although Kenta tried to hide it, it was clear from his tone that something had happened. The question was, how serious was it?

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Chapter 825: No guilt great enough

"What's wrong?" Lex asked, setting the cake on the table. Much of the area of the Inn was blanketed in snow, but the main areas where guests usually spent time had been kept clean. That included picnic areas such as this, so Lex had no trouble walking around.

"Wrong? What could be wrong? Nothing's wrong!" Kenta said, but clearly he was not very used to lying, as his expressions were clearly contorting. Lex turned to look at Sohee and Velma, both who immediately looked away. Velma even began whistling as she looked up in the air.

He looked back at Kenta and only pointed at the girls, as if their actions were enough of a dead giveaway.

"Oh yes, I remember now," said Kenta, who quickly looked towards the stove where he was cooking, as if he needed to monitor the progress.

"It's nothing, really. You already know I want to open my own restaurant, right? But before I ask anyone at the Inn for a shot, I thought I'd brush up on my skills. I don't get many opportunities to cook back at the palace, you know. So I went to the Guild room. Just like you said, there were a lot of people there who had opened up shops and were selling incredible goods. I placed an order, but before I could pay, I realized that that damned geezer had frozen all my assets! I was literally broke!"

Kenta smiled weakly at Lex, before quickly turning back to the stove.

"That's when Aoi offered to pay instead. I felt really guilty, but she insisted, so I eventually relented. It was completely her idea, and I offered to pay her back in the future, but she denied me. What could I do? But it was only after we had paid, and already received everything, that we recalled that you were sponsoring Aoi and Asami's stay, so the... eh, the bill probably got charged to you... ehehehe."

Lex's smile cramped.

"Mary, how much did they spend on groceries?" he asked. Since he had already stated that he would sponsor Aoi and Asami, he told Mary to take out all their expenses from him. With hundreds of billions of MP, he was not really concerned about how much they spent. But at the same time, he didn't like being taken advantage of.

"They spent 20,832 MP in total, including groceries and some other miscellaneous expenses."

Lex's expression fell flat, and he glared at Kenta. That was nearly 21,000 MP! To put it in easy terms, that was \$21,000,000! There was no amount of guilt Lex could feel that was worth 21 million dollars!

Sure, he had much more than that. But at the same time, he was certain that Aoi had not volunteered to pay on Kenta's behalf.

"It's okay," Lex said, as he slapped Kenta on the back, not holding his strength back at all. "What's a little money between friends?" He slapped him again. From afar, it looked like he was merely patting Kenta's back, though the expression on the elf's face said otherwise.

"Besides, I've already thought of a way you can pay me back. You can work as a chef in the restaurant that I am opening. I hope that you're a good cook, otherwise god only knows how long it'll take you to pay off your loan."

"Hey, hey, hey, take it up with Aoi, she's the one who spent the money!" Kenta exclaimed, but Lex was no longer listening. He had come here to relax, not get even more stressed out.

Deep inside the cosmic cloud where the allied forces were fighting off the Fuegians nurtured armies, there was a planet where many battalions were employed. How many were deployed, why they were sent there, and what did the allied forces hope to achieve, all of them were meaningless. The only thing that mattered was how deep inside the cloud they were.

Unbeknownst to most, this cosmic cloud was extremely different from normal ones. If not, why would the Fuegan have used it to begin with? This cosmic cloud was once connected to another place, though that was no longer the case.

As a result of that severed connection, however, space behaved in an unusual manner, and at the same time, was extremely vulnerable. One had to be extremely careful when operating in this region, lest they set off a destructive chain reaction.

A secret shuttle landed on the planet, hidden from the eyes of the allied forces and the Fuegan alike. Within the shuttle was a demon - a weak one, but one with great intelligence.

Once the shuttle landed, the demon took out a golden key and crushed it.

Instead of teleporting away, like he had done every time prior, something new happened. The crushed key was reformed, and a stream of information entered his mind.

The fabric of space in his locale was too vulnerable to support teleportation, even by the Midnight Inn. If they tried to teleport him over, space itself would rip on a massive scale in that region, which was something the Inn refrained from doing. If he wanted to teleport, he would either have to strengthen space around himself somehow, whether through use of a formation or his own abilities, or he would have to relocate.

The demon smiled.

Finally!

He immediately took out a device and sent a detailed message, making sure to specify all the information he had received from the golden key. Once the message was sent, the demon exited his shuttle and disappeared into the ground, as if he had not stepped on land but instead inside water.

Soon, his allies would be joining him, and before that happened, he had to collect all the information he could on the ground. As for the allied ships that were flying around the planet... someone else would take care of those.

After such a long time, his mission was finally beginning. The demon, although weak, had very strong killing tendencies. Suppressing them for so long had truly been a pain, but now it could finally let loose!

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Chapter 826: Stranded

The next few days formed a steady routine for Lex. He would absorb the blade of grass regularly, and he was on the verge of eating it all. Once that was done, Lex planned on giving the soil in the small pot containing the blade of grass to the turtle. Without exaggeration, the soil in that small pot was so potent it could affect the fertility of the entire Inn!

The effects were already showing, as he was recovering his skin at a noticeable rate. Sometimes, when he stood in the shadows, his inner organs were no longer visible.

His progress with swords was especially drastic. Qawain informed him that he had something inside his body that was trying to influence his sword intent, so he should not be in a rush to form it. He needed to achieve two things before he could attempt it.

The first was to master swordsmanship. He had to achieve a level that he felt was perfect, given his own body's capabilities. Then secondly, once he had mastered general swordsmanship, he had to use it in combat frequently enough till he was able to determine his preferences, and subsequently develop his own style. It was only after he had developed his own style of combat using a sword that he should attempt to manifest sword intent, as that will give him a clear picture of the kind of intent he wants.

That will prevent any hidden manipulation of the intent he forms by the entity inside of him.

Lex was extremely grateful for Qawain's guidance. After all, the purpose of developing sword intent was to absorb the sword aura inside of him, not for it to manipulate him! It was a dangerous path, but Lex began enjoying it, nonetheless.

Between these two extremely time consuming acts, Lex also found time to manage the Inn from time to time. When he needed to rest, he would either do so by cultivating atop the dragon, or by taking naps in the Recovery room. Things were going well.

Finally, exactly three weeks before the Inn was sealed, Vera's event began. Lex was surprised by the turnout. Although he had anticipated that a lot of guests would come, the attendance reached nearly twenty million! This was considering the short wait time between Vera deciding the event and it actually happening, not to mention that the event had not even been advertised yet officially!

Lex was tempted to join, but he didn't want to spend five days trapped inside. After all, he had his training routine. On this day, he would finally finish eating the blade of grass, so he wanted to rest as well. Besides, he could always peek inside as the Innkeeper if he was curious. He did not need to actually attend the event to know what was happening inside.

The Midnight Battalion had long become used to Z's war drums while fighting, so their absence was unusually jarring. But it could not be helped. The space in this region was too unusual. Z could not control it at all.

As if that was not enough, any time someone used an attack that was too powerful, the space on the planet would ripple. Those ripples were a lot more dangerous than they seemed, and quite a few had died from the effects of those ripples. Having space ripple through you was like having your body suddenly stretched across the length of an entire football field. Death was the most obvious outcome.

The Midnight Battalion had been somewhat protected by the effects of those ripples, but only due to how impressive their suits were. That did not, however, stop them from being injured gravely.

In fact, these were the worst injuries any of them suffered during the entire campaign.

The ripples, however, were the least of the issues. If space was too severely affected, sometimes space would rip, revealing a dangerous void.

Strange creatures would often come out of that void, creatures which lacked a mind or substance. They attacked without sense or direction and often ended up clashing against their own kind. When they faced others, however, the result was catastrophic.

In fact, if Luthor had not gained the ability to control an unusual purple fire on one of the previous planets, the Midnight Battalion may have suffered their first casualty when they encountered a creature none of their attacks would work on. Only the purple fire seemed to work in the end.

While the Midnight Battalion was still struggling, many of the other forces on the planet finally lost their nerve!

They called for a retreat and claimed that the planet was cursed! They told their superiors that the alliance should just give up on the planet or sacrifice it.

Of course, the alliance wouldn't call for a full retreat just because a few soldiers complained, but eventually it reached a point where they had no choice. There were too many casualties on the planet, and the remaining forces were on the verge of open desertion!

A full, strategic retreat was ordered, including for the Midnight Battalion. Though he would not admit it, Z breathed a sigh of relief when he heard the news. He had been getting a bad feeling from the moment

they arrived on the planet. Moreover, without the ability to manipulate space, his strength was extremely limited.

He, who had gotten used to being the strongest amongst the entire battalion, was feeling suffocated since he was suddenly unable to perform. That's when he had a realization. Main characters in anime did not have just one trump card, they had many. He could not rely just on space manipulation. He needed to come up with other abilities as well.

Just as he was musing about his new moves, a blinding light flashed in his eyes. He squinted, but looked directly towards the light to ascertain what it was. His past few months on the battlefield made it his instinct to assess all threats.

That's when he noticed it. Like fireworks, all the ships in orbit around the planet were exploding. They were stranded.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 827: Tough situation

It was not just the 1000 from the Midnight Battalion who looked up in the sky. Across the accursed planet, all the surviving soldiers looked at the light show. The brightness that filled the sky was, ironically, a sign of their dark future.

They did not know what had happened, or what was happening, but space battles between ships was not something new. They had witnessed them many times and had even taken part in them once or twice. But from what they could see from the planet, it did not look like there was a battle taking place. Instead, it seemed like the ships were spontaneously combusting.

"Midnight Battalion, defensive positions," Luthor said, his voice calm and steady, even if tinged with a hint of solemnity. "A single one of those explosions is enough to cause a ripple. So many of them are bound to cause an entire wave."

Around him, the battalion got in a circular formation, and activated some technique they all used in unison. Because of their stellar service these many months, they had been eligible for many rewards from the alliance, and this defensive formation was one of them.

A dome of light blue light formed around them, separating them from the outside. As if reminded by the battalion's actions, the others around them also began deploying their protective measures, but they were a step too slow.

A massive shift in reality crashed into them, though the shift seemed to be absorbed into the Midnight Battalion's shield. A few others also survived the episode, but a lot of soldiers who could not act fast enough died.

The ground beneath them cracked, and then following an earth-shattering sound, split into many fragments. Gusts of toxic gasses were released from deep within the ground, threatening to sweep any of their feet. Fortunately, all the soldiers who had made it this far had good quality, enchanted armor, or else the gasses may have corroded their skins as well.

If there was one good thing about such a volatile environment, it was that the space ripples would affect them and the Fuegan forces equally. Far off, many mindless creatures that had been bred to spread chaos died since they did not take any precautions.

Unfortunately, as if to make up for any respite they may gain, any time space would break new, more heinous enemies would emerge that were harder to kill.

"Someone contact the alliance and find out what's happening. Gerard, send out a beacon. Have all who are willing gather near us. We'll build a defensible position and wait till the alliance sends more ships. Sandra, I want you on patrol. Gather a team and scout our surroundings for any enemy activity. In case more enemies invade from space, we need to be ready. Pamela, I want you to rest up and be ready to deploy at a moment's notice. If any other teams decide to join us, they may have wounded that need treatment."

Luthors orders were passed through seamlessly, and the battalion started moving like a well oiled machine.

This was not the first time they had to build an impromptu defensive position, and so they had a dedicated team for this task. A phenomenon that seemed quite common is that all of those who had come out to participate in the war were unlocking new and random abilities. Jace, the head of the team who was responsible for creating a defensive position, underwent a mutation in his bloodline. Unlike the Regalia Bloom, which channeled energy through weapons and items, he could use energy to manipulate the earth and minerals. Using that ability, he could dig up trenches and erect walls wherever needed.

For now he was not too proficient in using the bloodline, so he was limited to only using his ability outside of combat for now.

Sandra was similarly another worker who had unlocked the ability to control electricity, or lightning. She had learned how to use the ability quite quickly, and had become one of their strongest members. Z had been especially helpful in guiding her on how she could use her abilities.

Finally, Pamela was the one member of the battalion who unlocked the most unique ability. She could heal anyone! Moreover, the energy for healing came neither from Pamela nor the injured person, so she could use the ability for a long time. Her mental stamina is what mattered most, for if she became too fatigued, her ability would stop working.

Once she had been a victim of bullying by an unruly guest at the Inn, so she had worked hard to become stronger. Who knew the ability she ultimately unlocked would not aid her fighting, but in war time made her more valuable than any other soldier. Being able to help her comrades made her feel more than satisfied with her ability, though he ones from the battalion barely ever needed her help to begin with.

Despite their dire situation, none in the battalion panicked. Although their situation was unusual, in the past months they had been through too many such dire situations to be affected easily.

They maintained their vigilance and did their duty, maintaining full faith in Luthor's ability to guide them out of tough situations. They also knew that, should Luthor ever fail, they could still rely on the Innkeeper. So while their vigilance never dropped, and they did not underestimate the seriousness of their dilemma, they were not as daunted as the other soldiers deployed on the planet.

"There's an issue," one of the battalion members said as they walked up to Luthor. "I am unable to contact the battalion regardless of what means I try. From technology to spirit techniques, all forms of communication are blocked."

Luthor frowned. The situation was bad, but not irredeemable. The alliance had strict protocols. In an hour, when their ships did not report to the alliance, they would notice something amiss and send reinforcements. They just had to wait.

"Hunker down, and prepare for a siege," he passed the order. Despite the obstacles, his demeanor never changed.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 828: Naps

Suera, Cosmic Cloud, Henali Command Center

The strategic coordination office was massive, and populated with hundreds of thousands of workers. Although they were not sitting in cubicles, each worker had a force field around them, preventing any sound from passing through, It would also restrict vision from the outside so no one could see what data the worker was handling.

All of this was done for the sake of protecting secret information from being leaked. Moreover, this was just one of the layers of protection in place. For example, the workers would be assigned tasks and complete them, but every name was replaced by codes, so they never really got to know who they were working with, or what locations were being mentioned.

"Troop carrier 117, my log shows you have maintained radio silence for one hour. What is your status?" asked one such worker. This was just one of thousands of such calls the same worker had made already just that day.

After a few moments of silence, he got a response.

"This is Troop carrier 117. Current status is on standby. Local conditions are not suitable for space engagements so there are no threats. Everything is normal for now," the ship responded.

The worker asked a few more routine questions, before marking the ship's status in his logs. He did not know which ship he was talking to, and what its mission was. His only job was to ascertain its status.

What he, and some other workers in that room, did not realize was that many of the ships reporting their status had actually been destroyed. It was unknown who was making the status report.

Lex walked out of his restroom with wobbly legs, though his eyes seemed to be filled with energy. He had finally completely absorbed the entire blade, so he need not suffer like that anymore.

His affinity with the law of regrowth had reached the maximum it could for now, so he planned on altering his schedule just a bit. He wanted to test out how much his ability to heal had grown, so he would spend the next couple of days within the Recovery room. He was looking forward to having skin again, and even if he was going to be hairless for a short while, it was not a big deal.

He would have to sacrifice his sword training for a few days, but since his mindset about that had changed, he did not mind. Since this was going to be a long journey, a delay of a few days would not set him back by much.

But first, even before sleeping in the Recovery room, Lex needed to recover some energy. He staggered to his dining table in his suite, and was quite satisfied to find it filled with countless dishes. Although the food provided by the Midnight Inn did not leave one wanting, it could not compete with the elite dishes made throughout the universe.

Lex did not take that too personally either, as the Inn had always struggled with food somewhat, especially meat items. Kenta's arrival was not going to change that, as one person could not cook for millions, but at least Lex was working him to the bone in the name of refining his cooking skills, and personally benefiting from it.

The ingredients he used were the best of the best, and so the food was always extremely nourishing. The flavor sometimes needed work, but Kenta was only an aspiring chef, so it made sense if he was still refining his skills.

Without any hesitation, Lex began to gobble down all the food as he simultaneously paid attention to Vera's event. At the moment, all the guests were still entering the venue and finding their 'destined' locations within. Only when the doors were sealed would the event fully begin. For now, there were only a few random diviners on stage discussing modern divination theory.

What Lex noticed almost immediately was that most of those participating were relatively young. Many who were in attendance were older, but they simply watched in silence. Either they were giving the younger generation an opportunity to shine, or nothing of interest to them had occurred yet.

Eventually Lex got tired of watching since he had no interest, nor did he have any knowledge about divination.

After finishing his meal, Lex teleported over to his personal Recovery room and comfortably lay down, making himself cozy. The good thing about eating Kenta's food was that it was extremely filling, even with his physique, which would make him feel slightly drowsy.

"Mary, in case I don't wake up on my own, wake me up in three days."

"Sure, I can do that," she answered.

He checked the Inn one last time, ensuring there was no problem, before going to sleep.

An entire day had gone by, and during this entire time, the battalion was not attacked even once. Instead of feeling relieved, Luthor frowned harder the longer they went without being attacked.

In the first few hours that they sent out their beacon, quite a few of the other troops decided to join them. After all, the Midnight Battalion had quite the reputation at this point, so fighting alongside them could never be wrong.

But then, eventually, even the other troops stopped coming. What's more, during this entire time, they could not contact the alliance, nor was there any indication of reinforcements arriving.

Sandra's team had been patrolling for hours, but eventually Luthor called them back as well since they could find neither friend nor foe.

Something was extremely wrong with this situation, and for the first time, Luthor began to actually worry.

Inside their freshly built fortifications, in one of the areas assigned to the troops who had decided to join them, two soldiers were sleeping beside one another. This was nothing unusual, as getting rest when the opportunity arose was a soldier's instinct.

But the next moment, both the soldiers woke up simultaneously and looked at each other. Their eyes began to turn black and their skin began to peel.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 829: The real demon

The soldiers truly had been soldiers before, and had even collaborated with the Midnight Battalion various times. On this that they had previously taken to calling the Cursed Planet, rather than its official name of BGY-987, their entire unit was positioned close to the battalion. That is why, when they were originally given the order to retreat, they took a path close to them.

When catastrophe struck, and the ships were destroyed, they were the first to spot the battalion's beacon. Fortunately, due to their close proximity, they arrived unharmed and without incident. Unfortunately, while the remainder of their companions were normal, at some point during the original retreat they had been separated from their group.

That was all it took for them to be captured, and turned into demons. Now, though they wore the outer appearance of their former selves, it was a mere facade. As demons they had their own instincts, but more importantly, they had an inclination to obey devils!

The specific breed of demons they had been turned into were called Nephil-drones, and were most commonly used by devils for slightly complicated tasks due to their retained intelligence.

Slowly and silently they stood up, making sure not to wake up any of the sleeping soldiers besides them. They had been given a mission to infiltrate the Midnight Battalion and sabotage them from the inside.

What the intentions and plans their superiors had they did not know, nor did they have the capacity to be curious. All they knew was that they had to weaken the Midnight Battalions defenses, but they were not allowed to kill any members of the battalion. Everyone else, though, was fair game.

Their instincts told them to immediately kill the sleeping soldiers besides them, but they had strict orders. As they channeled their inner demonic energy, more and more of their skin shed, revealing dark blue muscle beneath. Using their energy would remove their camouflage, but it no longer mattered.

They had received the signal from outside, which meant all the preparations were completed. The two split, channeling their demonic art as they walked, causing tiny bits of their dark blue muscles to shed, falling off their bodies like grains of sand.

When one of them exited the room, he saw another demon, half its decayed body showing from where its own disguise was failing. They made eye contact for a split second before they went their separate ways.

Minutes went by, slowly and excruciating, but they were not discovered through some miracle. One of the demons had spent a majority of his demonic energy, so he now moved onto the next phase of the plan.

Sticking to the shadows, he walked out their designated area, and turned towards the boundary wall. Before it could get too far, however, it noticed something unusual.

Right in front of it, sitting on a barrier that was only waist high, a child seemed to be munching on their rations.

Nephil-drones were a favorite among devils because, based on what their original species was, they retained enough intelligence to form their own complicated thoughts and consider many variables to complete their missions.

As the demon looked at the child, it began to notice multiple things. First of all it was night and this planet had no moon, yet they were still engulfed in a silver yet somehow milky light. There was also an eerie silence all around them, despite the fact that this was an encampment filled with thousands of soldiers. Sure many of them were asleep, but many should have also been awake. Yet there was none of the noise that usually accompanied a crowded camp.

In fact, the demon now finally noticed that the only sounds it could hear were the chewing of the child, and its own heartbeat.

As the demon's gaze lingered on the child, who had his face towards it though his focus remained on eating, the sound of crunching slowly became louder and louder. It was a trick of the mind perhaps, that the child also seemed to be coming closer, as if the gap between them was reducing.

But the demon was frozen still, so as to avoid making any noise and alerting the child, and the child himself was sitting still. Yet the space that divided them itself seemed to be reducing.

Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

The sound of eating seemed to be echoing in his ears, even as his heart beat ever faster.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Wait, what was that...

As the child somehow turned larger, or maybe came closer all without moving, the demon's gaze finally landed on the ration bar. It was oddly shaped, and had a distinct blue color that seemed so familiar to the demon...

Fear took a hold of the creature as it tried to retreat back into the shadows, but there were no shadows left. There was only the child, the sound of eating, and him.

By now the child seemed giant, and the creature had to crane his neck upwards because his gaze was fixed in the child's ration. As it got larger, the demon could finally recognize it completely. It was the demon itself the child was eating. It could see its own face, frozen to depict its final action: a wail, filled with absolute terror.

Crunch. The child took another bite, and it thundered in the demon's ears.

Silence. The demon's heart gave in, preferring the solace of eternal silence to matching the infernal noise of that child... of that true demon eating.

The demon died, in its sleep, unaware that it had been dreaming this entire time. Simultaneously, hundreds of other demons who had infiltrated, died at the same time, all of them in their sleep.

From the shadow a small child walked out, wiping the sweat off his face.

"Big brother Z was right, there really is a grand scheme at play in the background. How could he have known? Never mind, I better go report this to Luthor."

The child rushed off, his steps making nary a single sound. From his pocket he pulled out a ration bar, and the world seemed to darken further, if just for a moment.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 830: Alfonso

Luthor was in a room with Gerard and two others, a Minotaur and an Elf. The two outsiders were the leaders of the two largest groups of troops who had chosen to join Luthor. Had the Midnight Battalion not thoroughly established itself as extraordinarily formidable, the two leaders, both from extremely proud races, would never have accepted Luthor's leadership, even while taking refuge in his impromptu fort as they were.

Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on how they looked at it, both of them had already been humbled by the Midnight battalions unquestionable might. Even though they were of the human race, their strength rivaled that of the higher races.

They had gathered to discuss their plan of action, given their difficult situation. The fact that they had not faced a single adversary in so long did not put them at ease whatsoever. Before their retreat was ordered the entire planet seemed to be brimming with danger and death. Yet the moment they were stranded, with no sign of a rescue incoming any time soon, it became as silent as a grave.

Clearly, something was wrong. They had to determine what the threat was, and how to survive it.

Yet the room was silent. There was no discussion. All four of them stared at each other in silence as they struggled to come up with an explanation for what was happening. After all, nothing they had come up with so far made any sense.

The silence was eventually interrupted, not by one of them speaking, but by the door that suddenly opened. A child who looked like he was perhaps nine years old came strutting in, crumbs covering his face.

"I have a report," the child said, explaining his intrusion upon feeling the glares that fell on him.

"Alfonso, you've taken your face mask off again," said Luthor admonishingly. His eyes gleamed as saw the crumbs on his face, and then on his pocket.

Alfonso was one of the Inn workers who had awoken a unique power, but his ability was far was the most... unique and unnerving.

The first thing that happened when he unlocked his power was that his body deaged, going from that of an adult to that of a small child. If many had not seen it happen in person they would have found it hard to believe. Another was that Luthor felt like Alfonso was no longer human, but he had no proof of this theory, just his intuition.

There were a few other minor changes, but the most unusual were his abilities. At any given time, Alfonso had two abilities. The first was always fixed, which was that he could pull out a snack from his pocket.

The ability could be used unlimitedly, as far as anyone could tell. Moreover, the snack could be eaten by anyone and was extremely nourishing, not only for one's physique, but cultivation as well.

The second ability changed frequently, and without pattern. The reason why it was determined that Alfonso had two abilities, and not multiple abilities, was because he could only manifest two abilities at a time, the first always being pulling out snacks. The second, whatever it may be, could either be extremely useful or completely ordinary, and Alfonso had no control over when it would change.

He could not use a previous ability after it disappeared, though the ability may return at any time. The only good thing about this was that whenever a new ability appeared, he innately knew how to use it without having a learning curve.

Luthor had a few theories about why such a phenomenon was occurring, but it did not matter for now. No matter what his identity, ability or race, as long as he was a member of the Midnight Inn, none of them would discriminate against him.

"Oh, my bad!" he exclaimed, suddenly remembering that he intended to put the back on before Luthor saw so he could hide the fact that he had been munching again. "But, this is more important than that! When we got stranded on the Cursed Planet, big brother Z told me to treat this as my training arc, and to assume there was a grand conspiracy going on in the background. So I was secretly watching everyone's dreams in case there was a spy!"

Alfonso gave the elf and minotaur an accusatory glare, before continuing!

"It turns out, there were hundreds of demons hidden among those who followed our beacon! Just minutes ago, they all got an order to wake up and sabotage the camp! Although I took care of them, I think trouble is going to come soon."

Forgetting he was supposed to put on his mask, Alfonso pulled out another snack from his pocket and began munching, a proud look on his face.

"The soldiers turned into demons?" the elf repeated, his mind quickly processing the information. Despite his young appearance, the elf did not doubt the child. The Midnight Battalion was battle tested, so there was no reason to doubt their competence. Moreover, they were extremely united. Picking on one meant turning all 1000 of them into your enemy.

"Such a thing can only be done by a devil. Have the devils betrayed us? Have they partnered with the Fuegan?"

"The more important question is why have they not killed us yet. If they can destroy all the ships in space, they have enough firepower to wipe us out as well. There really may be some conspiracy going on," said Luthor, analyzing the situation himself. He immediately thought of the Innkeepers business card, but then shook his head.

No, he needed to find out more about the situation before he jumped to conclusions. He could not disturb the Innkeeper if they could handle the situation themselves.

"Take us to the bodies," Gerard said. He was the most calm out of all of them. His bloodline had undergone a total of three mutations. Right now, he was so powerful that there were few enemies that could intimidate him. Even if there was a conspiracy, he merely needed to kill all the conspirators to get out of it.