

## **Innkeeper 900**

### Chapter 900 Second test

Unlike the previous part of the temple, which displayed some lag in returning to life, the area that Lex entered now reacted to his presence immediately. The lights immediately turned on, and in mere moments, the smell of incense began to fill the halls.

Even though this area could only be accessed after a test, the halls looked roomier and, in a way that was imperceptible if focused on, somehow more grand. It was as if by perfecting, or altering, the tiniest of details that one never even took in, the impression of this area had been improved dramatically.

Clearly, this area was designed to hold more people than the first. In a way, it made sense. If anyone were to enter the temple, they would surely be in a rush to increase their authority and gain access to the better services of the Inn.

He did not get much time to admire the cozy ambience, for he was led directly to the entrance of the next test. There were over 1000 different test doors, each one designed to test and award authority based on different criteria. But since the services Lex was eventually going to avail had to do with combat strength, increasing his authority this way made the most sense.

The door opened with a rumble to reveal a wall of smoke which quickly spread now that it had somewhere to go. The sound, the smell, the subtle influence of the aura from within all were perfectly aligned to build a feeling of anticipation and suspense that went along with facing a difficult challenge. No doubt these were designed to feed upon the already existing nervousness of the contestant.

Lex merely appreciated the extra effort even though it did not seem like it was needed, and walked through the wall of smoke. The smoke did not block just his vision but his spirit sense as well, but it did not surround him long.

When he emerged, he found himself standing in an abandoned courtyard. Lex turned to look back, and found that the entrance through which he came was absent. In its stead was a stone arch atop a small bridge, which connected the courtyard to a complex walkway that seemed to be connected to endless other courtyards. He no longer seemed to be in the temple, but out in the open somewhere. But since Lex never felt the use of spatial laws, he could only assume that all of this was some kind of illusion.

"DO YOU WISH TO BEGIN?"

The words appeared in front of him again, and Lex unhesitantly pressed 'Yes'. As if activated by his acceptance, the sky turned a shade of red, as if affected by the setting sun, and long shadows covered the courtyard he was standing in. The scene suddenly turned ominous.

Lex did not see his opponent, but perhaps that was the point.

He scanned the courtyard with his eyes as well as his other senses, but discovered naught but the absence of any other living being. Mateo had not warned him what the test would entail, so Lex had no choice but to explore.

Since the courtyard was empty, he turned around and left, summoning his new, massive sword.

In the resounding silence, even the soft wind sounded like a hurricane, and the leaves it carried like organic wind chimes. Lex's footsteps made no sound this time around, as he consciously put in some effort to restrain himself. The effect of his own hard work was only amplified by the Stealth suit that he wore.

After exploring a bit, Lex concluded that he seemed to be walking the grounds of a large castle of some kind, with each courtyard intending to be an individual class. For some reason, Lex could visualize hundreds of students practicing martial arts on these grounds, like in an old Chinese film.

After a while, when he became used to the identical scene each courtyard presented him with, Lex finally spotted something new.

Instead of being empty, the latest courtyard he approached seemed to have a body lying right in the middle, a pool of blood spreading around it. The fact that the pool of blood was still spreading meant that injury was recent.

'Woosh!'

Though his gaze was locked on the body, Lex moved his hand and covered his body with the massive sword, using its blade to block some of the leaves that seemed to be passing by harmlessly. A few sparks formed where the leaves hit the blade, before they fell to the ground. They were actually leaf 'blades'!

"An assassination..." Lex muttered as he turned around, but still saw nothing. It made sense. The first test was a direct confrontation, so the next one tested his awareness. He did not know the number of foes, their weapons or their means, which placed him at a great disadvantage.

Moreover, while he had been able to easily sense the attack, with both his own conscious senses as well as his instincts, he had not been able to lock down on the attacker.

"Not bad," Lex commented. If the attacker was in the same realm as him, as was the case in the previous test, then it was worth praise that the assassin could hide from him. This one was already more interesting than the first test. Lex actually started to look forward to all the other tests and what they had in store for him.

With no more attacks coming his way, Lex turned his attention back towards the body and began approaching it.

It seemed to be a female human, if one were to judge by the long hair alone. The figure and the details of the body were obscured by the angle at which it lay, though the pool of blood still seemed to be growing.

Lex did not seem in a hurry as he approached the body, massive sword still in hand, but even as he reached the body itself, nothing more happened.

Due to his... stature... Lex did not need to bend down, to touch the body. He simply reached out, held it by the shoulder, and turned it over. A completely decayed skull revealed itself, a lingering aura of dread attached to it, as if immortalizing the last emotion felt by her.

Even in the silence, Lex did not hear the sprinting assassins, but he sensed their arrival, anyway. He turned around, swinging his sword once more to deflect their attacks, and finally laid eyes on two ninjas, throwing darts at him.

The moment his sword blocked the darts, the dead body on the ground behind him seemed to come to life and stabbed towards his tiny heart with a hidden knife.

Even though Lex had every confidence that the attack would never harm him, he saw no reason to let the attack even land.

When the defensive suit was being made, Gieves had a vision of the hopelessness of his enemies when they barely broke through his suit, only to be unable to harm him at all. Now, after experiencing it himself, Lex decided to add a layer to it.

Why should he let the attacks even touch him in the first place? This way, his enemies would have to first overcome the obstacle of landing the hit in the first place before they even worried about breaking through his suit.

Lex manipulated space, slowing down the assassin dressed as a corpse, and jumped out of the way. He would have been fast enough to dodge on his own, but since he used space in combination with his skills to defeat the previous armor, he saw no reason to revert back to old habits.

Since he was training, he should improve his combat style every opportunity he got.

In the air, Lex saw the corpse-assassin moving slowly, as if his entire body was moving through quicksand. Sensing an opportunity, he hurled his sword at him, reverting space back to normal just as the blade came within range.

The assassin tried to evade, but the width of the sword was too massive, and impaled him to the ground. Now he was bleeding out for real.

The remaining two ninja-assassins had not been lazing about. They closed the distance to Lex and drew two short swords and attacked him while he was still in the air. A multitude of ideas crossed Lex's mind, but he settled for the simplest one.

As soon as the assassins neared, Lex stretched out his hands without fear of injury, and grabbed the blade of the swords and pulled the assassins closer before they let go. Since they had attacked Lex while he was in the air, they found themselves without any support as they were pulled through the air according to Lex's whims.

Lex spun, mimicking a maneuver he saw Gisele do once, and positioned the swords in such a way that they ended up stabbing the other assassin.

By the time Lex landed, all three assassins were dead. It was time for the next test.