

## **Innkeeper 91**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 91: Leaders from the universe

So far, on his little expansion during breakfast Lex had already spent 56,100MP. It truly spoke volumes about how criminally understaffed he had been. He should give Velma and Gerard some kind of reward. He'd put it on his to do list, because for now he wasn't done. There was one more thing that he had been putting off, one more thing he had been dreading to even look at because of his severe lack of MP. Yet now, he could not wait to explore.

He opened up the Gift Shop tab to look at what else he could purchase, and indeed, a few new items were waiting for him. He smiled as he read through the new items descriptions.

Bath towel:

Don't you hate it when you get something disgusting on yourself? Cleaning up is such a hassle. The Bath towel rids the user of negative status that are affecting the user via the skin i.e. poison, paralysis paste, petrification, tracking powder, bad makeup etc. Can affect Foundation realm and below

Travel size face washing kit:

Sometimes, when you don't feel like yourself, it's good to be someone else. Allows user to change their appearance as they wish for 24 hours. Please note, only physical appearance changes, not height, body structure, finger prints, spiritual signature, gait etc.

Selfie stick:

Whether you're traveling the countryside, shopping in a mall, fighting a legion of enemies, there is no wrong time to take a selfie. Whoever you hit with the stick will temporarily be petrified, as if posing for a selfie. Duration of petrification is variable, but Qi training cultivators can be petrified for 10 seconds.

Lex smiled, satisfied with the few new additions and directly purchased them and put them in the shop. The Bath towel was sold for 300MP, while the other two were sold for 200MP, all of them giving a profit of 100MP.

Lex concluded this just as he finished his breakfast. Lex grinned in satisfaction as he stood up. He felt slightly bloated, but the feeling would pass in a bit. Now, he had to focus on where else he could make improvements. He had upgraded the Recovery room twice and had reached his limit, so he supposed he could upgrade the other places as well...

Lex frowned. Currently he didn't really need to upgrade them, and though he had a lot of MP he should not treat it as infinite. He would let the other place be for now, but there was one thing that did require an upgrade. Lex disappeared and reappeared in his greenhouse. Currently neither the garner nor the turtle were present, though Lex did not suspect them of slacking. Even if they were resting, just looking at the condition of the greenhouse let him know the amount of work they had been doing. The plants had all been rearranged. At first they were divided by their use and type, while now they seemed to be mixed. Lex was sure that this arrangement served some kind of purpose, but even beyond that they formed a strange symmetry that felt pleasant to look at.

What pleased him the most was that his vegetables looked almost ready. Admittedly, he did not know what vegetables ready to be picked looked like, but just the fact that from seeds they had grown into sizable plants was enough to tell him what he needed to know.

Without any hesitation, Lex upgraded the greenhouse twice, spending 15,000MP. The upgrade seemed very lackluster in Lex's opinion as there was no visible change, but he didn't doubt the system system so he disappeared. What he did not know was that the gardener instantly became aware of the upgrade as well as the new functions of the greenhouse. The Gardener almost collapsed when he found out as he knew that the turtle would want to rearrange the garden, once again.

With that done, Lex turned his attention towards more selfish tasks. He had given all of his employee's residences, but had ignored his own. As the owner of the Inn, he too could have a residence in a separate space - though his would be more expensive. Yet since he was going to be spending all his time here now, he didn't see why he shouldn't reward himself.

He spent a hefty 20,000MP on establishing his own residence. It was nothing too fancy, though there were options for those as well, and only built himself a single story apartment.

The apartment had a living room that was simultaneously also the dining room, along with a small kitchen, two bedrooms, a study, a restroom, a meditation room and a training room.

Yes, Lex liked to live simply and humbly. The meditation room and training room had the same effects as the ones in the Inn, and despite the fact that he still had to pay to use them they were very convenient. The apartment was, of course, fully furnished.

Satisfied, Lex went to his study room and began working towards his upcoming event. Although the event was thirteen days away, and the announcement of the details would be in nine days, Lex had a lot of preparations to do. He opened up the event management panel and looked at a very important tab that read 'paid promotion'. Yes, it was exactly what one would expect. Lex could pay MP to promote his event in all three worlds. Since he was planning on having a large event, how could he rely on word of mouth to spread the news. The scope of the event would be too limited if only a few dozen, or even a few hundred people came. He was running the Midnight Inn, not a small community comic con - he needed attendance!

But letting guests come early would not be good, and he needed to establish a premise for his publicity and an incentive for participation. He noted down a few ideas, played them out in his head, then crossed out a few and then worked on them again. When he was finally satisfied with what he wanted he smiled, and paid the 150,000MP promotion fee! That was 50,000MP per planet, but considering how he was doing his promotion it felt cheap.

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Somewhere on Nibiru, in a large palace underwater, a young mermaid was playing with a similarly young sea serpent. Large, intricate runes formed chandeliers above the playing child, and changed colors according to her mood. The mermaid, who was only a few weeks old, was easily entertained.

Watching over her in the distance was a much larger and more ferocious looking sea serpent. If someone from Earth saw this blue colored monstrosity they would think of a chinese dragon, yet despite its power and prestige, the serpent did not have the audacity to add dragon to its title.

"They will grow up as friends," the serpent murmured.

"It will be a happy childhood," replied a beast that looked like a massive lobster. "It would be best if the child's identity is forever forgotten. She does not need to bear such burdens. She should be free to choose the path her heart desires."

The serpent was about to reply, but suddenly it felt a massive surge in spiritual energy. It felt the surge pass through the underwater palace until it reached him, and then froze around the serpent. It felt like it was locked under the gaze of an unknown entity, and though the serpent felt no hostility, the strength of that gaze caused the serpent to tense up.

"Havval El'Yun," a booming voice spoke in its mind, "ruler of the Jade Sea, King of Serpents, your strength is recognized and your reign acknowledged. You are invited in nine days time to the Midnight Inn to discuss participation of your kingdom in the Midnight Games. Strength and glory to those who win, a chance to witness history for those who lose. Which of those will be yours?"

The spiritual energy disappeared along with the unknown gaze, but in their place a single silver key was left. Somehow, Havval knew that the key would turn golden in nine days and take him away - if he had the guts to follow it. What Havval did not know, however, was that it was not the only one on Nibiru to hear the voice. All the Kings, Queens and rulers of all the nations felt the spiritual surge and heard a corresponding message - the universal equivalent of spam messaging.

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On Vegus Minima, General Ragnar sat in front of a hologram that depicted the entire planet. Every inch of land, every battlefield, every citizen were shown on that hologram, because it was being streamed directly to him from the several Juggernaut class vessels in space. He watched, not with his eyes, but with his spiritual sense every single detail and remembered all of them. Every moment he was receiving more information than even the best and most powerful computers on Earth could handle. But the frown on his face was not because he was getting too much information, but because he was not getting what he was searching for.

Eventually he sighed and began preparing his report that they were still not able to locate the Demon's spawning portals but stopped when the devices around him reported an unusual surge in spiritual energy.

"Ragnar Asulf," a voice boomed in his head, "Son of the Empire, Hells Butcher, your ruthlessness is known and your leadership is admired..."

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### Chapter 92: Not welcome without the wife

When General Ragnar heard the complete message and received the silver key, he did not act alarmed nor was he surprised by the sudden event. He knew enough about high leveled cultivators to know what they were capable of. He simply accepted the key after scanning it for potential traps or poisons, and then sent an emergency communication to the command carrier explaining what he had encountered.

The command carrier was like a forward operating base, but for space instead. It was a massive spaceship that harbored the main combat and logistics ships for any space based deployment. The command carrier assigned to this reclamation deployment of the Vegus System was actually hidden somewhere outside the solar system. Not only was it equipped with weapons that could completely decimate planets and shields so powerful that it could protect the ship from a direct collision with a sun, it could communicate directly back to the Jotun Empire's central command planet from anywhere in the known universe.

Shortly after his communication he received some information as well as new orders. Apparently, he was not the only one who received the message. Although he was assigned the entire planet, there were several colonels under him who controlled several bases around it. All colonels with enough power (not cultivation power, power to command) also received the message. It was also suspected that all the commanding officers of the Demon's legions also received the communication. He was ordered to command the delegation that would head to the Midnight Inn. His purpose was to gather intel on the nature of the organization known as 'Midnight Inn' and establish a preliminary relationship with it representing the Jotun Empire. He also had the discretion to make decisions based on the evolving situation once he went to the Midnight Inn keeping the interests of the Empire in mind.

Ragnar did not hesitate, and immediately started preparation. His first order of business, establish a new chain of command on the planet while he was gone in case this was a trap. In the meantime, he did not stop the search for the spawn portal either.

Somewhere on the other side of the planet, an especially malevolent looking zombie stared at the floating silver key in front of it. It took a moment before it made some sort of decision, and changed its appearance, retracting its several extra limbs, claws, fangs, wings and tail. In the end, the zombie looked like a frail, malnourished college student with no features to distinguish it from a zombie. It grabbed the key before retreating through a portal.

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On Earth things had finally calmed down slightly after the tense few days following the Alexander assassination attempt, yet suddenly yesterday everything changed. Every ICPA on the planet started enforcing a very strict curfew and mortal armies of several nations were deployed to their borders. Most people did not understand what was happening and conspiracy theories were abundant. Only a select few knew that the current situation was a result of some actions taken by the Morrison family. Even fewer knew what those actions were.

Four separate families received an emergency summon from Brandon Morrison, who also claimed that he was returning to Earth to hold the meeting in person. This had various consequences, as the four heads of those families were immediately informed. All four of them grimaced at the news, as such a meeting would only be called if it concerned gravely important matters. While they were preparing themselves for the worst, the situation escalated further.

An open broadcast sent out on a secret channel known only to the top echelon of Earth sent out the message that if Brandon Morrison dared to land on Earth without his wife present, his landing shuttle would be nuked!

This was the exact message that caused every ICPA, every nation and every top cultivator on Earth to panic and prepare for the worst. This was because the origin of the message was not hidden. In fact, not only was it not hidden, the person who sent out the message even identified themselves during the broadcast.

It was sent by the oldest and most mysterious figure in the cultivation world. This mysterious personage was known the world over only by the title of 'The Queen', and no one knew her actual name. How strong was she? How old was she? What was her origin? What were her intentions? No one knew the answer to any of these questions. The only thing people knew was that The Queen lived in a certain palace in London and that her image was often printed on various currencies across the globe!

Although Brandon assured everyone that he was coming with his wife, everyone was still tense. Very few actually knew the significance of him coming with his wife as opposed to without, and this caused everyone to speculate madly.

While all this was happening, one of the primary people responsible for the confusion on Earth, The Queen, was sitting casually in her garden sipping a Piña Colada while her pet Corgi ran around beside her. One would expect that a cultivator of such prestige would have high leveled beasts as pets, but no, these were just regular dogs. It was raining in London, but naturally none of the rain fell in The Queens

garden. How would the rain dare to fall there without acquiescence from the ancient one? She did not at all look concerned regarding the upcoming meeting or its contents, let alone the status of the world. No, her attention was towards a TV screen on which a cricket match was being played. The World Cup was going to be held the next year, how could she not follow the progress of her favorite team?

It was while she was focused on the TV that she felt a surge in spirit energy, and a booming voice said, "Your majesty The Queen, your kingdom is prosperous and your wisdom is legend. You are invited in nine days time to the Midnight Inn..."

She heard the whole message, received the key and then turned her attention back to the match. The timing of the message was too coincidental. It seemed she had deduced the purpose of her upcoming meeting of the five families.

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Lex chuckled to himself as he imagined the reactions of the various leaders on the three planets. It was extremely annoying receiving spam emails and messages all the time on Earth, but he had to say sending his own messages felt rather interesting.

Yet he could not linger in his musings. Once the promotion was taken care of, he had a few other key things to take care of. He had titled this event the Midnight Games, since he could not think of a better title, but he still had not exactly figured out the content of the 'games' or how the event would proceed. He needed to do a lot of research for that before he made a decision, this was also the reason why he had a 10 day buffer before announcing the details of the event. It would give him time to decide the exact details.

But that was not all. How could he not take advantage of such an opportunity to make some more MP? He had to figure out the best way to monetize this event - fortunately the event panel gave him a few options there as well. What were these options? Why, limited edition merchandise based on the event of course! How could you doubt the business sense of the young man who spent so much time in capitalist America? It was the most amazing feature of America, after all. The only people who complained about it were the ones who could not learn to take advantage of it.

Tshirts, caps, drinks, flyers, posters, food, drinks, toys and more were all options available to him. Even better was the fact that all of these items could be designed and altered at a moments notice, so if any one person performed well and gained a lot of fans during the events Lex could immediately create merchandise around that person. Would this affect the prestige of the Inn? Lex didn't think so, and even

if it did, he could just hire a PR consultant. Why sweat the small stuff when he could pay someone to do that for him?

Another, and much more important aspect for Lex to look at was security. He was expecting thousands of participants, and tens of thousands of viewers. Most of those would be cultivators? There was bound to be troublemakers and even if he upgraded his Butter Knife there was no way he could handle all of it. Fortunately, the event manager panel provided a solution to this. Unfortunately, the solution was expensive. Yet how much exactly was Lex willing to spend, that was the conundrum he was facing at the moment. It was better to be safe than sorry, but he hadn't even paid for the event yet, he could not blow his entire budget just on security. Or, at the very least, he would have to increase his budget and somehow get even more MP. If only the system accepted mortgages.

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Chapter 93: Leo

For Lex, security was very important, but it was also very expensive. After staring at his options for a long while, he decided to deal with it at the end. How much MP he had left once he'd planned for the event would determine how much he would spend.

"Mary, is there something the system can do to help me speed up my cultivation? Or, at least, my employees' cultivation?"

"There are many things that can speed up your cultivation. Unfortunately, the System cannot provide them to you. Maybe if you get lucky one day you'll receive something in a quest reward that'll help you. But it's unlikely as the focus of the system is to develop the Inn, not your cultivation. You have to rely on yourself for that."

Lex sighed in defeat. Since he had a cheat anyway, why didn't it let him cheat all the way? He turned his attention back to the event panel and looked at temporary accommodation. He didn't want to build too many permanent rooms right now as his Inn would get cramped, and as someone who spent several years in New York he'd had enough of that. Another solid 100,000MP was tucked towards 1000 temporary rooms that guests could rent during the event.

The cultural event would take place in the coliseum, and would precede the combat portion. There were multiple phases for both, and the way Lex had planned it out was that the first phase was similar to a festival with several booths or 'stalls' held concurrently. Guests could view them from their rooms or go and view them in person. Lex was initially planning on having some kind of voting system that would promote the best stalls, or perhaps choose them himself, but he found the event planner had options

for that as well. Whichever exhibit garnered the best responses could automatically be detected and promoted.

Of course, doing it this way turned things into some sort of performance rather than just showing cultural exhibits or historical pieces. For example, if someone wanted to show historically relevant paintings that affected their culture they could garner interest once by people but in the later phases showing the same stuff would not elicit the same reaction.

Lex had thought of a solution for that as well. Should an exhibit want to do that, during the first phase they could show the historical painting or artifact, and during the later phases they could make new paintings or whatever else to show how the previous ones influenced modern creation. And if some people didn't like that idea? Well tough luck. From the moment the concept of a prize for the winning planet was introduced the event changed from a pure cultural sharing experience to some sort of competition. Such was the nature of the world. Or the universe. Whatever.

Lex spent the next few hours fine tuning the details for the cultural portion of the event and the proceedings. Eventually when he was done he prepared to go back and continue meditating, but scanned the Inn once first. Marlo was still in the meditation room and Helen was sitting in a lawn chair surrounded by peacocks once again.

Yet this time Lex noticed a difference in Helen. While all previous times he had seen her she seemed preoccupied or lost in thought, this time, she just seemed bored. She was stuck at the Inn, and with her thoughts much clearer now she felt she had nothing to do. She spent some time cultivating, but similar to extraneous exercise, it had to be done in moderation or she would hurt herself. This left her with nothing to do.

Just as Lex was considering if he should do something about that, he received a new notification.

Emergency Quest:

Your guest has stayed at the Inn for several days and has become disillusioned by your paltry attempts to seem grand. Provide a distraction or entertainment for your guest!

Quest time limit: 3 hours

Quest failure punishment: -1000MP

Quest reward: Elegant top hat

The punishment was almost negligible to Lex now, but he still didn't want to fail. But how should he distract her? How should he entertain her?

He quickly looked through the Midnight Market but found no new buildings or options for entertainment.

"Any ideas?" he asked Mary.

She shook her head and said, "I can't help you with Quests, Lex. You're the host, not me. These are things you need to figure out on your own."

Lex frowned as he thought of what he could do. Previously he wanted to bring in movies and shows from Earth, but then it would be suspicious if he only had content from Earth and not other planets. Not to mention, it would seem strange if he as the Innkeeper fretted over each and every minor detail, such as providing entertainment for a single guest so he should not be directly involved as well. He needed to maintain his image as a mysterious and powerful being. It would be so much more convenient he could create a clone to do stuff or...

Lex froze as he felt an idea coming to him. He could feel it, it was right there, on the tip of his thoughts, just out of reach. It was like a word he knew but forgot when someone asked him for it. Just out of reach. Quickly he went through his thoughts again to see what triggered it.

It would be convenient if he could have a clone or someone who could pretend to be an employee to do the things he could not as the Innkeeper!

Eureka! He had an epiphany! He quickly checked the Midnight market to see if he could do what he wanted. It didn't have what he wanted exactly, but he checked a few different things and tested a certain item he had to see if they worked together, and, unexpectedly, things worked out.

Lex grinned and bought a building and put it right next to John's shop that had a banner reading 'Battle Ax'. It was a strange name choice, but Lex didn't question it. Lex smiled as he quickly designed the new building, and designed its interior. He had to admit, as he thought of the possibilities of what he could do he was having a little fun.

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Helen sat lazily in her lawn chair as she thought of random things. She was bored, but she didn't mind too much. It was rare for her to have so much free time in her life. Even idle boredom was a novel experience.

Yet when she heard some noise in the distance and immediately recognized it to be the sound of a new building being raised at the Inn. She'd seen enough of them to appear to become familiar with it by now. A new building also meant a new service, which intrigued her. She got off her chair and asked Gerard to bring a golf cart to take her to the commotion. She didn't mind the walk, but she liked indulging the old man.

She'd spent some time talking with Gerard, as she had with all the other staff at the Inn. Most of them were very simple and pure, and had straightforward personalities. The only thing they wanted was to serve the guests and make sure they were happy, and had very few interests beyond that. Velma, she had noticed, absolutely loved gossip. But because of her professionalism, she never spied on guests. Yet whenever Helen chatted with her, the young girl listened with the eager interest of a child with wanderlust.

Gerard was easier to please, as all she had to do was let him drive her places. She didn't envy them as she was quite content with her own life, but she found it remarkable that they all enjoyed such simple pleasures.

When she approached the part of the Inn she now called Main street, she saw the new building and when she read the name her jaw dropped.

'No way! It can't be,' she thought. This was the Midnight Inn, how could such a place find its way here? Yet she was even more curious to find out.

Without any hesitation Helen entered the building that wore a banner reading "Gamer's Den'. The first thing she saw was a relatively young man standing in the shop wearing jeans and a Tshirt. She noticed that he was also wearing the Clark Kent glasses, but so was she so she was not one to judge.

When the young man saw her he revealed an excited grin and said, "Welcome! Wow, my first guest already. That was faster than I was expecting. You can call me Leo and this is my Gaming Center! If you give me just a moment, I'm still downloading all the games onto the computers. As soon as they're done I'll show you this game I think you'll absolutely love. It's called League of Lex's, or LOL for short. LOL is super popular, I think you'll learn it pretty quickly."

'Leo' paused for a second when he got a notification for quest completion, but then turned his attention back to Helen and started asking her if she'd played any games before. Oh yes, this was going to be fun.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 94: Playing games to cultivate

Leo was, naturally, Lex. He simply took off his Host Attire and put on one of the glasses to stay anonymous. He still did not use his actual name though, to avoid even the chance of any suspicion.

He was excited because he had finally figured out a way to interact with his guests without having to worry about how he appears. He could ask the stupidest questions - after all, he was just the owner of a gaming shop. It wasn't even magical, like the barber shop or the Battle Ax. It was straight up video games on computers. It was unfortunate that he couldn't connect the shop to the Internet back on Earth but he could make do.

Other than video games the computers would have an extensive library of movies and videos to watch, but it would take time to transfer all the data. How did Lex manage to get all these games and videos if the shop couldn't connect to the internet, you ask? As it turns out, through the Fancy Monocle! When Lex had connected it to the internet to build up its own database, it had absorbed everything. Lex could selectively upload the data from the Fancy Monocle onto his computers. Who knew other than its original purpose the Monocle could act as a USB? It just went to show that he should not limit his understanding of things according to the system's descriptions.

"I've never played video games before, is it too complicated?" asked Helen. She was up to try it - when else would she get the chance to game so casually?

"No, not at all. It's very simple. I'll teach you, it'll be very easy. And if you don't like this game, just wait a bit. New games are being added to the system as we speak, it'll just take some time."

The gaming shop was both on the ground and first floor. On the ground floor guests would be able to rent a chair and desk where they would get access to a computer along with all the essentials such as mouse, keyboard, controllers (if you prefer) headset and whatever else you wanted. On the first floor guests could rent private rooms so that they could game in peace without the distraction of being in public. He kept both options available because sometimes the atmosphere of the shop contributed to the gaming experience, but sometimes during important matches you could not deal with any distractions. This way both options would be fulfilled. Also, for anyone who wanted to play VR games they would have to rent the rooms.

Lex took Helen to a seat and started the game for her. He took the desk beside her and booted the game up for himself as well.

"I'll help you through a few games while you get the hang of it," he said, as he set up the LAN party. From the counter a small figure watched the two.

The A.I. for the store, who was known only as Z, was the first A.I. who already had a name upon being summoned. He was also different from the other A.I. staff in another important manner - the rest were all adults, even Velma was in her teens. Z on the other hand looked like he was ten years old. When he was sure that the two were preoccupied with whatever they were doing, Z opened the admin computer and started watching an anime called Initial C. It was a racing anime with the main character being an old man who looked somewhat similar to Gerard. Summoning one of the snacks sold at the Gaming shop and unceremoniously charging it on Lex's tab, Z started watching anime.

Neither Lex nor Helen noticed this as Lex was walking her through the tutorial and controls. League of Lex's, or LOL, was played using several different heroes all of whom had different abilities. It was a game where one had to compete for limited resources and equipment with the enemy, all the while attacking the enemy base to keep pressure on them and prevent them from getting those resources as well.

"These heroes are based on real life cultivators on Earth," Leo said, once he was done explaining the various Hero abilities.

"Really?" Helen asked, surprised.

"I dunno, probably," Leo replied. By now he had already selected his own Hero and had completely forgotten about Helen.

Helen was annoyed at Leo, but also curious about him. He was older than her by a lot, at least by her standards it was a lot, but he was the one acting like an excitable child.

He started the game and they were playing against the computer, and contrary to her surprise he did not abandon her to go play, but walked her through the map and introduced her to the many mechanics of the game. He helped her fight enemies, collect resources, get familiar with her abilities, learn about cool downs and more. When enemy Heros attacked them he helped hold them off so she could practice combat.

The speed at which she was picking up the controls was astonishing, and within ten minutes she did not need Leo's help at all. At this point he left her alone, so she could try and get used to playing alone while he went to a different part of the map. Surprisingly, they had good synergy and quickly defeated the computer. Satisfied with Helen's skill level, Leo said that this time he'd play against her so that there was more of a challenge.

She was very receptive to the idea and Leo started a new game. For the first few minutes Leo almost felt bad for her, as not only was he very experienced in the game, his skill had only increased since he started cultivating. But quickly he noticed that Helen was dominating the game. She was killing off the Heros on his team and stealing all the resources she would need to build her armies. Leo went to block her, but found that he was always one step behind her. Something was definitely wrong. It was then it occurred to him, SHE WAS ALSO A CULTIVATOR! Not only was she a cultivator, her realm was above his so her response would naturally be even better.

The game shop owner took this personally and started playing without holding anything back as this was no longer a matter of entertaining a guest but a matter of honor. The match finally ended with Leo taking a reluctant lead, but Helen asked to play again. The second match was a draw, the third in Helen's favor and the fourth another draw! Without realizing it, the two had been playing for over two hours!

When Leo noticed the time he knew he had to stop as he had other things to take care of, so he left Helen to her own devices. He let her know that other games would also have been downloaded by now if she wanted to explore, and that since she was his first guest he wouldn't charge her this time around so she could play as long as she wanted.

The young girl was a little disappointed to see Leo go, as she wanted to defeat him thoroughly, but consoled herself by saying she would do so next time. Leo asked Z to take care of Helen if she needed anything, and left the shop.

The shop owner disappeared, and reappeared in his apartment. He took off his glasses and changed back into Lex. The Innkeeper was a little pale as he had exhausted a lot of mental energy focusing on the game. Helen still had not mastered the full mechanics of the game, but her reaction time made it difficult to compete with her. He would get his revenge next time and show her what real skill was.

He took a nice, long shower to relax before he went to the Meditation room. Lex had decided to meditate everyday to increase his cultivation. Just as he was getting into position and about to begin, Mary appeared in front of him looking hesitant and confused.

"What is it?" Lex asked, ready to receive some bad news.

"I can't be sure, but I think..." There was a lot of hesitation as she took a pause, before finally deciding to state the insane fact she had discovered. "It seems like playing video games has the same effect on you as meditation."

"WHAT?" Lex asked excitedly as he jumped up. This was too good to be true, right? Meditation was difficult and sometimes boring, while gaming was the exact opposite. How could they be interchangeable?

"Well, I'm not sure yet and there's no conclusive proof. You should keep meditating for now, but this is definitely something we can research. If it's true, who knows, your gaming shop could actually qualify to become a real Midnight Inn service."

Lex grinned. One research paper he wrote in college were the mental benefits of gaming. As a true gamer - one who regularly showered and took care of his hygiene, Lex was strictly against gamer stereotypes - how could he miss the opportunity to benefit the gaming community?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 95: The five families

As much as Lex would have liked to go back and play some games, he could not take any risks. He sat down to meditate and after a few hours of varied success, he went to sleep. It was a rare peaceful day, but Lex knew the coming days would be super busy so he needed to rest while he had the chance.

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Brandon's shuttle landed on a private airfield yet the landing itself was not a private affair. Various interested parties and powers were watching from a distance. Audery was the first to exit the shuttle, much to the relief of the viewers. She was followed closely by Brandon, and Alexander who was completely wrapped in bandages. Although he was completely fine, they wanted to give the impression that he had been seriously affected by the poison they proclaimed had affected him.

Yet the onlookers didn't have much time to analyze his condition as the family quickly got into a car and left. What they did not know was that the Alexander who followed Brandon was a decoy, and the real Alexander left the area wearing a synthetic facemask that gave him a different appearance. His grandfather was on the way to the meeting while Alexander would go and retrieve Helen before meeting up with them.

Unbeknownst to the world, four of the five Nascent realm cultivators of Earth had gathered in Geneva and were awaiting Brandon's arrival. Of the four, only the Queen was a public figure. The others stayed out of the limelight and could not be bothered to put up a public front. A tall yet skinny old man named Sam sat lazily on a Lazy Boy sofa. In his younger days he was very active in North America, and was the true origin of the term 'Uncle Sam' that represented the government's authority in America. Yet lately he had retreated from the front stage to live a secular life.

A rather ordinary looking Chinese man sat opposite to Sam, dressed very modestly. He also looked rather aged, though no one knew how old he really was. He went by the English name of Richard and no one here knew his actual name. Behind him stood a young girl dressed in traditional attire. She looked around the room with a lot of curiosity, but did not speak or interact with anyone. While in her normal day to day life she was treated with a lot of importance, in this room she was the most insignificant.

In a stark contrast to all the aged yet physically fit looking cultivators present, a fat, middle aged man was sitting by himself munching on chili chips. Although he was not asian, he was making use of chopsticks to pick each individual chip and eat it to avoid getting the chili dust on his fingers. Wearing an extremely loose Tshirt and gray pajamas, the man looked as if he was lounging. His attention was on a phone screen in front of him that was playing a movie, and he had headphones in.

They continued this way for a short while until Brandon finally arrived, Audery following closely behind. All eyes turned to him when he entered, and then turned to Audery. Everyone, even the fat man, breathed a secret sigh of relief when they saw her.

The couple smiled at the response, they were quite used to it. Compared to everyone else, Brandon looked much younger as he had broken into the Nascent realm at a very young age. He was also actually much younger than everyone else as well, so he maintained his youthful vigor in comparison to the rest. That, combined with the natural charm emitted by a high leveled cultivator paired with Brandon's usual cavalier attitude gave everyone here a headache. More than one young lady from their respective families had fallen prey to the old man's flirtations, though thankfully he never did anything beyond that.

In the entire world, very literally on all of Earth, Audery was the only person who could control Brandon. Not that bringing her along made things much better, the two were known for their endless shenanigans. There were countless international incidents that the two were suspected of being behind. The only time they had been caught was during an incident when Brandon was going around using the alias D. B. Cooper. They were also the reason that the Mona Lisa was stored behind a bullet proof glass case that actually had spiritual enhancements as well. No one could prove it, but it was also suspected that they were the source of the mystery at the Bermuda triangle.

All-in-all, the two were a troublesome duo, but they were still much better together than alone. Even Audrey, who seemed so demure most of the time, was not any less dangerous than Brandon. She had once changed the regime in an actual country because she felt the leader was not very handsome. The replacement, who she did consider good looking, then had a bounty placed on his head by Brandon.

"Welcome back to Earth Brandon. I hope you had a pleasant trip," said Richard politely.

"It was long but not bad, Rich. How have you been? How's the family?"

"I've been well. My family is doing well. This is my great-granddaughter, Selene. She is quite talented in cultivation, I'm hoping she will succeed me one day." He pointed to the young girl behind him, who bowed to the youngest Nascent cultivator, but had a look of hesitation in her eyes. Clearly she had been briefed to keep a distance from him.

"If you want her to succeed you, you need to feed her more. Look at how skinny the poor girl is, she's practically anorexic," said the fat middle aged man. Everyone directly ignored whatever he had to say.

Unlike everyone else here, the fat man was not originally a cultivator. He was a mortal who got lost in a forest once and ate some random plant that elevated his cultivation all the way to Nascent overnight! Since then it had become this guy's hobby to eat anything and everything edible all the time. All he did was eat. He owned several restaurants around the world and had even developed his own cultivation technique that revolved around eating that he passed down in his family.

"Can we focus on the matter at hand? I have things I'd rather be doing," said the Queen.

"Yes, it's better not to delay," agreed Sam, fixing his posture from his previous slouch. "I believe everyone here heard the invitation to the Midnight Games. I'm assuming that's why you're here as well, Brandon."

"Midnight games?" he said, questioningly. Like all the other two planets, the announcement was only made to leaders who were on the planet, so Brandon, who was traveling through space at the time, did not hear it.

"I'm not sure how you guys know about it, but I suspect we are talking about the same thing. Richard, since you've already selected an heir, you will also be particularly interested in this. I believe I've discovered a place where anyone can naturally break through to the Nascent."

All five other people in the room suddenly lost their slacked demeanor and looked at Brandon with eager eyes. This was not a joking matter.

"Let me start from the beginning," Brandon said, and started telling the group everything that happened, starting with Alexander's assassination attempt.

Once they all heard the story, they similarly told him how they all heard the invitation by name to an event called the Midnight Games. It did not even need to be debated if the games had anything to do with the Inn, it was already obvious. No, the people in that room were pondering over another question

"Selene, go out for a while. The following discussion is not for you," said Richard, dismissing his granddaughter. This was the point where normally Brandon would have dismissed Audrey as well, but no one suffered the illusion that the man kept any secrets from his wife.

"The question now is, do we report to them?" asked the fat man hesitantly.

"Naturally, we don't have any other choice," stated Sam bluntly. "If it is later discovered that we have been keeping secrets, we will immediately be replaced."

The room fell into silence. The Midnight Inn represented a great opportunity for them as well as for all of Earth, but whether or not they could avail such an opportunity was not up to them. After a few more minutes, the Queen took out a laptop from a bag she was carrying and opened it.

Instead of booting up, the laptop projected the image of a woman up into the air. She seemed surprised by the call of the five.

"What's the matter? Has something happened? Is it another Beast tide? It seems too soon for that."

The five exchanged looks, before turning towards Brandon. Since he was the only one to have been to the Inn, he should be the one to make the report.

"Earth has come into contact with other Star level civilizations," Brandon started off.

"That's impossible. Up to one million light years of space surrounding the solar system are under our surveillance. No one can enter undetected."

""It's not so simple. Let me explain..." Brandon started giving his report to the floating projection, giving clear details of everything he had seen and experienced. If anyone else were to see him they would be shocked! He was one of the leaders of one of the solar system. He commanded the largest cultivator army, and had endless resources at his disposal. Who could make him report to them? Yet here he was, along with all the other powerful cultivators of Earth, giving a simple report, hoping for a favorable response. At this moment, he was no longer a commander of legions - he was a simple subordinate. He was even well behaved in front of her. Though, whether that was because of the woman's status or his wife standing behind him, no one could say.

The Innkeeper

## Chapter 96: Interlude

When Brandon finished giving his explanation, the woman stared in silence as she contemplated his words. It did not take long, however, before she reached a decision. "Increase surveillance on the guests I've sent to Earth. Make sure they're comfortable, but don't limit them. Try to keep them from going to the Inn, but if you can't then just report to me. Regarding the Inn and the Midnight games, you may do as you see fit so long as it does not compromise the safety of Earth. Before the gathering in a week, I'll send someone over to join you and observe."

With those instructions given, the woman's hologram disappeared and the people in the room breathed a sigh of relief. With that out of the way, they now needed to decide their own actions.

"Brandon, you're the one who's been there. How do you suggest we prepare for the upcoming games?"

"I've already put a considerable amount of thought into this. I'll let you know how I plan on deploying my family's resources. What you decide to do is up to you..." The meeting continued for the better part of the day, and by the time they dispersed it was well into the night. Silently, all five families started preparing for the upcoming Midnight Games, but what they did not know was that shortly after their own meeting finished another one was held in a bunker deep underneath the Sahara desert.

"Our opportunity has arrived," said one of the people sitting in the bunker. "It's a lot earlier than expected, but we'll never get another chance like this again. Ready our forces, and start moving our assets into place. A revolution is on the horizon."

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When Lex woke up the next morning, not only was he feeling extremely refreshed, he also felt extremely motivated. Today he needed to do some research on how events were held and what format to keep the combat portion of the games in.

The original reason he wanted to avoid having a combat portion was because he did not want the death of multiple people on his conscience. When he kept getting interrupted and lost his temper he spontaneously decided to fight against the zombies, but even so he didn't want to host an upfront war scenario as that would result in many deaths and he would feel responsible since the only reason they died was because they participated in his event.

But what exactly was the format going to be? He did not know yet, and that's where the research aspect came in. After having a hearty breakfast and scanning the Inn once to make sure everything was in order, he promptly returned to Earth. After turning his phone back on and responding to his family's text, he found his way to the nearest public library.

He hopped onto a computer and started looking up every famous competition in history. He checked out everything from the Olympics and Commonwealth games to World Championships and municipal tournaments. He looked at high school and college events to small cultural ceremonies and competitions in various third world countries. While he was researching, he got a notification for Quest completion and checked to find out that he had completed his quest to grow spiritual vegetables! He received three seeds for rare plants and directly transferred them to the gardener and had him plant them, along with instructions to plant a lot more vegetables as he was expecting a lot of guests in a couple of weeks.

Lex returned to his research, treating the interaction as an ordinary interlude, but what he did not realize was how important those seeds would be to him. When they were titled as rare, they were not rare on a continental or planetary basis, but instead they were rare in the whole universe. He would later learn that, in fact, he would not even have been able to successfully plant them without the aid of the Galactic Sovereign turtle.

He stayed there until one of the librarians came to tell him that the library is getting ready to close. Lex exited, but before he returned to the Inn he sent Larry a text asking if he was okay. Lex was expecting to have messages from him waiting when he turned on his phone, but there was nothing. The silence was unusual and Lex was slightly concerned, especially considering the circumstances when he left. When Lex did not receive a reply after a short while, he decided to return to the Inn and check again tomorrow morning. If he still didn't hear anything, he would consider what to do. Maybe he would kick Marlo out of the Inn to go clean up his mess.

When he returned to the Inn, he was surprised to find that at some point Helen had left. It was worth noticing that Hugo's booked room had also been freed up recently, so after a Inn time the Inn was once again without any guests. If it weren't for Harry who was practicing his sorcery in his shop and John who was actually playing video games in the Gamer's Den.

Intrigued, Lex checked up on him to find him playing the AAA game called Hitmale, about a man who was raised his entire life as an assassin carrying out multiple missions.

Lex himself had never played the game, but it was popular for how broken the game was. Yet as long as people found it entertaining, who cared? Lex was tempted to don the Leo persona and go interact a

little with John, but he had work to do. Lex returned to the study in his own residence and started working on the event. He started determining the distinctions between each stage, how guests would come, where they would stay between stages. He had to make a distinction between participants and viewers.

He also needed to prepare for the announcement meeting he had called. For that meeting the invitations had gone out to all the various leaders on the three planets. Such a meeting could not be taken lightly, and he needed to have all his preparations done by then.

After working for a few hours, Lex retreated to the meditation room before eventually heading to bed. The next few days went by in a similar, peaceful manner. Without any unexpected surprises or interruptions, Lex slowly felt his state of mind improving. His fast progress was surprising not only to himself but to Mary as well, though she did not tell him that. At the current pace, he would undergo the procedure right before the Midnight Games started.

Finally, three days before the meeting took place a new guest entered the Inn via the Pro Bono program, alerting Lex. If that's all there was to it, Lex may not have been concerned at all since he had a well trained staff and system now. What really threw him for a loop was the notification from the System that he did not have adequate facilities to cater to the guest.

Confused, Lex scanned the Inn to investigate the situation and was alarmed by what he discovered. In the small lake he had built next to the Recovery room a baby whale was swimming in circles, full of confusion and alarm!

The lake was too small for the baby whale, and it kept getting trapped as soon as it swam even slightly close to the edge.

"Mary, what can I do?" Lex asked as he looked at the calf. "Would I have to expand the lake?"

"Expanding the lake and establishing a different biome for other types of guests is definitely a good idea, but that way you'll have to duplicate all the buildings in each biome. There's an easier solution. You can buy the Multi-Environmental Subsistence facility. Buying one for all environment types may be out of your budget, but you can definitely buy focused ones for water based guests."

Without hesitation Lex went to the Midnight market, searched for the Multi-Environmental Subsistence facility and bought it for 300,000MP! It must be noted, this facility was focused and would only allow marine based guests to survive in the open.

The change was immediate. A thin layer of water surrounded the baby whale and allowed it to swim directly out of the lake. The water followed the whale wherever it went, giving rise to the unique sight of a baby whale flying around the Inn surrounded by a kitty pool worth of water.

The whale was freed from its immediate conundrum of being constricted to a tiny body of water, but it was not relieved yet. It was apparent to Lex from the way the whale flew around frantically that it was still confused or scared, maybe even both.

"I guess it's time for me to go to work," Lex said to Mary with a smile, and disappeared.

Lex reappeared right in the whale path, as if he was standing on thin air. "Please guest, be at ease. You are safe here, no one will harm you."

Lex's voice carried with it a calming effect, soothing the distressed whale. The whale did not question why it could understand Lex, but once it understood that it was safe it stopped swimming haphazardly. Then it started crying.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 97: Good or evil?

Lex was dumbfounded by the crying whale. He looked towards Mary for some advice, but the hologram looked confused and defeated as well. Lex tried multiple times to console or question the baby whale, but it would only cry without saying anything. He checked its status to see if he could discover some details that would help him.

Name: -

Age: <1 year

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Mortal

Species: Whale

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Ordinary

Remarks: The whale suffers from a broken heart

Lex learned that the whale was less than a year old and had no cultivation at all, but that did not help him much. For once, the remarks were not snarky and only said that the whale had a broken heart, but Lex did not know what to do about that.

But Lex did not need to do anything as very soon the Galactic Sovereign turtle appeared on the scene, softly saying "oh dear" repeatedly.

It grew out a vine from the ground that softly wrapped itself around the whale and brought it down. The turtle made a hand out of grass and used it to softly caress the crying whale as he whispered things to it. The whale seemed immediately fond of the turtle, and continued to whimper as it listened to the turtle. Eventually, the turtle led the whale towards the forest, pulling its giant body with the vine.

Lex watched the two leave in silence, relieved that the situation was handled yet strangely concerned about the whale as well. He decided to check up on the whale in a little while to see what had happened.

For now, he turned his attention to the Inn. The Midnight Games were about to begin and while he had his preparations done, he was concerned about his two non-A.I. employees. Harry did not seem at all disturbed by the lack of guests lately and could always be found practicing his sorcery in his barber shop. Lex had handed him a new cultivators guide that he downloaded directly from the Bluebird online platform. The young barber had already registered himself as a 'cultivator' back on Earth and had attained a legal status. In fact, he had also joined a rather loose organization of beauticians who happened to be cultivators. They were all low level, with the highest in the organization being peak Qi

training realm, but the focus of all the cultivators in that group was fashion and style. Or at least that's what Lex understood they did, he did not look too deeply into it.

Lex had also used his identity as Leo to get some information out of the young barber about sorcery. Unlike cultivators who grew stronger using spirit energy, sorcerers channeled their abilities using the strength of their soul, as well as external artifacts. Cultivators grew stronger inherently, which then raised the level of their souls. Sorcerers directly strengthened their souls, which then reflected in the growth of their strength. Harry did not explain in too much detail, but Lex understood that a simplified explanation for one of the main ways to grow stronger in sorcery was to constantly practice and use your abilities.

A result of his constant practice was that he would not completely exhaust himself after giving a single haircut using his abilities, like before, although his stamina had not increased by much.

Something interesting that Lex also learned was that Harry also received mini-quests of his own from the system that he fulfilled back on Earth which helped him raise his strength. It seemed like the system was grooming his employees well.

Lex turned his attention to John, and found him once again in the Gamer's Den. This time he was not playing games, but watching anime with Z. Lex did not know how to feel about John. He would never practice or meditate or do anything productive. He would always only be found in the Gamer's Den. Using his Leo identity, Lex had asked him some details as well. It seemed like the only thing John was interested in was going into the Mystery Trial, yet since he had had no customers, John had no MP to go to the trial.

This intrigued Lex. Apparently John had gone into the Mystery Trial, but did not gain anything. He did not learn any new skills or discover any flaws in his existing ones. He was only beaten up, and that too quite terribly. That was unusual as the Trial was supposed to be very helpful, but if it was John was not willing to mention it. Lex decided that once he was done with the Midnight Games he would try the trials as well. For now he didn't want to distract himself.

Speaking of distraction, a couple days ago Lex had wasted the whole day because he was slightly careless. His latest quest reward was an item called Elegant Top hat. As is usual, Lex had forgotten about it when he completed the quest and only looked at it much later. It had a very useful ability. While wearing it, it could enhance the capability of his brain by upto a hundred times, depending on how one used it.

Lex put it on to try it out. He only elevated his ability by five, and at first he felt no difference. He thought he would be smarter or more enlightened or something. It turned out the wording was not clear about what the ability of the hat was. It sped up his thoughts, so that anything that was happening in front of him seemed to be happening in slow motion. The event wasn't actually slowed down, just his perception of it had increased so much that it appeared to be happening incredibly slowly.

Lex played around with the hat a lot, but a side effect of using it was that it would drain you mentally. Lex quickly discovered that after using it for only a short amount of time, he was so mentally drained that he slept for 18 hours afterwards. Suffice to say he got no actual work done that day.

Lex continued to check up on all aspects of the Inn. Marlo was still in the meditation room, with no indication of when he would come out. His A.I. staff had mostly entered the Body Tempering realm, which Lex was happy about. Everything was as it should be.

Finally, Lex went to the turtle to inquire about the whale. What he did not expect at all was that when he arrived at the forest, the whale's status had changed from a Pro Bono guest to the turtle's pet!

HOW HAD THE TURTLE TAKEN ONE OF HIS GUESTS AS A PET?! Not only had the system recognized the whale as a pet, its name had been changed to Little Blue! Lex cursed a hundred times in his head! Why didn't the system care when he was naming the turtle Little Black? Whose system was this anyway?

"What's going on?" he finally managed to ask, looking grim. All jokes aside, he couldn't allow his guests to be scammed. He needed to learn the details, or otherwise wouldn't his reputation be ruined in the universe.

"Little Blue's family was hunted down and killed by fishermen," answered the gardener, who looked at the whale with pity. The turtle and the whale were practically stuck together right now, and although the whale did not look sad at the moment the turtle was not taking any risks.

Lex silently listened to the gardener explain what it had learnt. The whale was not from any other planet, it was from Earth! It was completely ordinary and had no cultivation whatsoever, and neither did any of the whales it grew up with. His family had been hunted by fishermen and Little Blue had either escaped or was let go for being too young - that point was a little unclear.

Lex grimaced as he heard the story, then let out a sorrowful sigh. The whale's story was tragic, but he understood the perpetrators probably weren't evil. Although whaling had been reduced in recent years, it was not completely banned and some countries still partook in it.

Suddenly Lex had a bitter taste in his mouth. He was reminded of Nibiru, where humans were the ones who were at the bottom of the food chain. In either case, could the perpetrators be called evil? It was just how the natural food chain set them up.

For the first time in his life, he understood the saying he commonly read in novels. Weakness is the original sin. No one was inherently evil, usually, but it often happened that one person's interests harmed another.

Lex's mood started fluctuating so he quickly retreated back to his residence and started meditating. He was probably going to see a lot more situations like this across the universe. He needed to get used to it, or figure out how he was going to deal with it.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 98:

It took some time for Lex to stabilize his emotions this time around. His mind kept slowly inching him towards feeling guilt towards Little Blue for what had happened to it. He had to constantly stop himself from having wandering thoughts and focus back on meditating. Eventually, when he finally stabilized his mood and meditated. When he was done, he discovered that while it was harder for him to meditate this time around, the benefits had also been greater.

With his mood calmed down and his thoughts clear, he firmly came to the conclusion that he cannot take ownership of guilt on behalf of others, even if they were from the same race as him. He only had to focus on his own actions and act according to his own conscience. Even if others were saints he would get no credit, and if others were devils he would get no blame.

With that out of the way, Lex turned his attention back towards his event. He was feeling a little excited now, and it was only a couple days away from the arrival of all the leaders.

He looked at his MP and had around two million one hundred thousand. Originally he kept a budget of only 1 million MP for the event, but with the scope of what he was planning it was not enough. He had

been waiting till the last moment to spend his MP as he did not want to rent stuff for too long, as each day would cost him more. But now it was time. First, he had to get the big stuff out of the way.

He had already decided on the awards for both portions of the event, so he spent 250,000MP on each. The amount might seem like a lot, but considering that the prize was for a whole planet, it was actually very cheap. In fact, it was one of the cheapest options available in the event management panel under rewards for an entire planet. Before the prize was actually awarded he would be able to upgrade them if he wanted, but Lex would only do that if he earned an enormous amount during the event itself. Right now it was difficult to judge the earning potential, so he would have to wait and see.

His next expense would be the extra staff for the event. This cost him only 50,000MP. In this package he would not get any actual new staff, but each individual guest would get a private hologram assistant when they arrived at the Inn during this period. The assistant would be able to answer all their questions regarding the Inn or the event, and if they needed any actual service they would be able to use the power of the System to automatically provide them.

His next two expenses were the ones that strained his budget the most, but were one's he absolutely could not do without. The first one was event security. He was expecting a lot of guests to attend the event, not only because he would tell the various leaders who were going to attend to bring as many guests as they wanted, but he was going to distribute silver keys throughout the three worlds that would automatically activate when the event started. Due to the massive number of guests, he was absolutely sure that someone would disturb the peace. Parents fought each other during their kids talent shows let alone crowds during such a large event that would be representing worlds. So Lex put a heavy hand on his heart and spent 450,000MP on security.

This would get him 200 peak Golden Core guards, 50 peak Nascent realm guards, and 10 guards at the peak of the realm above Nascent. Lex found it slightly humorous that he could hire guards at that cultivation level, but his authority with the Inn was not enough to view the name or learn details about that realm. Still, he felt that these guards should be adequate to maintain the crowds. He wasn't sure what the highest cultivators on the other planets were, but he was hoping none of them were on the same level as Bastet as he was sure she was much more powerful than even his strongest guards. Though, based on public knowledge of cultivators on Earth, his guards should be more than enough to handle any trouble. All the guards that appeared seemed to be wearing suits, fashioned after the style of his own Host Attire. Lex absolutely did not mind having tough but well dressed guards keeping the discipline.

In total, the two awards, the extra staff and the event security cost him exactly 1,000,000MP! He had already spent his entire original budget. Keep in mind, so far he had not purchased any event related

items to be sold, any decorations, any consolatory prizes, not to mention keep an emergency fund for unforeseen expenses.

Still, he had 1,195,526 MP left. That should be more than enough to cover any unexpected expenses. Or so he originally thought. Although Mary did not give him any advice whatsoever, he would often tell her his plans while he was drafting them. The holographic assistant, unbeknownst to herself, had a terrible poker face and Lex would often find it easy to read her thoughts. So when he saw her hesitant and worried look after he finished his plans, he realized he was missing something. After a little trial and error, he came to a single conclusion: he was missing a private bodyguard. A private bodyguard was different from the event security. Their attention would be divided amongst the entire crowd all throughout the event. His private bodyguard would focus solely on defending himself.

Still, considering the great deal he got for 450,000 MP, it should not be a problem to get a good deal on a private bodyguard. He mentioned the amount he was planning on spending to Mary, but discovered that while she still did not say anything, her appearance did not get better. Lex frowned, thought about it a bit, and decided his own personal safety was worth splurging on. After all, if he were dead, what was the point of saving MP? So he resolutely decided to spend 500,000MP on a personal bodyguard! Just as he was about to make the expense, he noticed that Mary still looked worried.

That stopped him in his tracks. This was no longer a simple expense. The fact that such a large amount still did not assure her meant that he was clearly underestimating the strength of his incoming guests. But it did not make sense, all three planets were 1 Star, and should have had the same level of cultivators. He was not expecting cultivators on the level of Bastet because she clearly stated that she had been put on Earth as punishment by her father, meaning someone of her level should not have been on such a planet. She was an anomaly, not a norm. In that case 500,000 MP on a single bodyguard should have been overkill. But the fact that it wasn't meant that he was missing something.

Lex thought about it a little, and went back to everything he knew about each planet. It only took a little contemplation before he remembered something incredibly obvious that he had overlooked. When Blane, Chen and Lily had come last time he had spied on their conversations just a bit. He had learnt that the Jotun Empire was reclaiming their planets. Lex did not know the Jotun Empire, but clearly an Empire that could colonize other planets from completely different galaxies could not have been simple. Since he invited the leaders on Vegus Minima, they would have learnt about the Inn. It was completely possible for them to send some very powerful cultivators to investigate.

Realizing his mistake, Lex no longer hesitated. It hurt his heart to spend so much, but he ultimately decided to spend 1,000,000 MP on a body guard! That left him with only 195,526 MP but Lex could make it work..

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Somewhere on the opposite end of the universe, far beyond the reach of simple entities such as the Jotun Empire or Demons or Bastet and Falak, a cultivator was practicing a new attack skill. He needed to practice only once to learn an attacking skill to its highest level, but for all other types of skills he would require extra effort. Yet he did not mind, he firmly believed that offense was the strongest offense, and had learnt various attacks that ranged from physical to spiritual to even soul attacks. He could attack using elements, he could attack using dreams, beliefs, thoughts, and most recently he had learned to attack even with laws. He was blessed when it came to his combat capabilities. To be more exact, he had Mo's Blessing, a cultivation technique that could destroy the universe itself when he reached the highest level.

Yet what he was practicing right now was not an attack but a stealth technique, so it would require some time. Still, he did not mind as he had all the time in the universe.

"Host, you have a new Limited Edition Quest. You can choose to accept or reject it. You have five minutes to decide," he heard a feminine voice in his head.

"A Limited Edition Quest? I haven't encountered quests like that before, what's the difference?"

"Checking host authority...host authority insufficient to learn details...using special bloodline clearance...host authority partially accepted. A Limited Time Quest is one that comes with certain conditions. You have the option of accepting or rejecting without any consequence, however if you accept the Quest and fail you will be punished heavily. Yet if you succeed in the quest you will be rewarded correspondingly."

"What are the details of this quest?"

"You have to act as someone's bodyguard for a week. The special condition for this quest is that after you finish, all your memories of the duration of the quest will be erased by the system to protect the identity of the person you were protecting."

The man smiled in amusement.

"Interesting. Can I decide the reward for the quest? I want to change the quest reward to simply raise my authority as much as possible. The level of the system is too low, it cannot benefit me at my strength right now whatsoever."

"Negative, the reward is fixed...using special bloodline clearance...reward changed. If you accept the quest your authority will be raised by 10 levels, if you fail you will have 0.5 bad hair days while you are in public. Do you accept?"

The man's smile grew. The system was too amusing. If he didn't know better, he would say the system was in love with him.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 99: The Bodyguard

Lex had to wait a few minutes before his bodyguard finally showed up. Emerging from a bright light, Lex saw a handsome man walk out. He had long, silky blonde hair and sunkissed skin. At first glance Lex assumed the bodyguard was human, but after looking at him for a while something started to feel off. While he had the appearance of a human, something about him told Lex that the being in front of him absolutely wasn't human. What Lex did not know was that he was being protected by the natural aura emitted by the bodyguard. If he could have felt the aura, he would have been even more assured of his guess.

"Welcome, you can call me the Innkeeper," Lex finally said.

While Lex had been observing the bodyguard, the bodyguard had similarly been observing the Innkeeper. He was unable to determine the Innkeeper's cultivation, and was surprised that the Innkeeper remained unaffected by his natural aura. This had nothing to do with cultivation - his natural aura suppressed others on a biological level so even those with a higher cultivation than himself would be affected. The only exception the bodyguard had seen was when he suppressed his own aura consciously to prevent it from affecting others.

Lex took this time while they observed one another to check the bodyguards status and was surprised by what he saw.

Name: \*&%error%&\*

Age: \*&%error%&\*

Sex: \*&%error%&\*

Cultivation Details: \*&%error%&\*

Species: \*&%error%&\*

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

His status was almost identical to John's, which was unusual. Lex had to figure out what exactly it was that caused these errors in his status, it didn't feel good being left out of the loop.

Finally the bodyguard nodded in acknowledgment, but did not say anything. After that the bodyguard disappeared, as if he had teleported somewhere but Lex knew he was still closeby. The system had informed him of the bodyguards duties. The bodyguard would protect him anytime anyone took action against Lex with malicious or hostile intent, but was under no obligation to listen to Lex's orders. To assure Lex, the system also told him that the bodyguard was incredibly powerful and had a strong incentive to protect Lex otherwise he would suffer a strong punishment for failure. If only Lex knew what that punishment was, he would not have been so assured.

With that out of the way, Lex returned to his preparations. A little something that irked him was that Marlo was still in the meditation room. Despite his inner voice telling him to save his MP at the moment, Lex spent 10,000 MP to upgrade the Meditation room so that whatever Marlo was trying to achieve would be done sooner.

Something worth nothing was that he eventually managed to contact Larry on Earth, but Larry was behaving strangely. Lex assumed it might have something to do with Marlo's disappearance so he really wanted the old geezer to return.

Lex started changing the appearance of the Inn a bit, putting up lights and adding sky lanterns in the sky so that the Inn would look more festive. He even spent 10 MP to buy a suit that could be worn by Little Blue. Despite his large size, the baby whale looked adorable in the new costume.

It was during this time that Lex started receiving some guests. Naturally it wasn't the guests invited for the event, but those that already had Golden keys. It was Chen and Lily, who arrived with several bags in tow. Literally they were covered from head to toe with bags, and as soon as they arrived at the Inn they collapsed, dropping the bags on the ground. Various cores, papers and other gadgets fell out of their bags but the duo quickly started cleaning up.

"Please, allow me," Lex said as he summoned Gerard and his subordinates who loaded all the stuff onto their golf carts. "That's quite a lot of luggage. Are you planning on having a longer trip?"

"Thank you for your assistance," said Lily, handing her bags to the staff. "These are not actually our luggage but some things for your guests from Earth that we met last time - Rorick and his party. We agreed to trade a few things."

"In that case, you should have them bring your stuff to the Guild room. You can explore it yourself as well in the meantime, I think it will serve you well."

"Thank you, we will," she said as she sat in the golf cart and allowed Gerard to take them away.

Lex was curious about why the duo came without Blane this time around as he had always accompanied Chen, but they weren't talking about it so spying on them would not change anything.

He took a backseat on things and watched as his staff handled the two guests, to see if there was something he would need to correct. Having a well trained staff that didn't always require his supervision was extremely important. And now that those two had arrived, he expected more guests would start arriving shortly as well.

He was correct, though he could not have guessed who his next guest was. It was Ayesha, one of the few guests that Lex had completely missed. She arrived at the Inn, looking a little forlorn. Lex was quite curious about this guest of his. Not only did she leave a surplus of 10,855 MP at the Inn, she and her counterpart were probably the ones who enjoyed the Inn the most.

Lex had watched a playback of them flying around the Inn, enjoying themselves. Such youthful spirit was something Lex greatly appreciated.

He checked her status once before approaching her.

Name: Ayesha Shehzad

Age: 15

Sex: Female

Cultivation Details: None

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

"Welcome guest, to the Midnight Inn. I am the Innkeeper, owner of this humble establishment. I greatly regret missing your previous arrival, I hope you found our services to be adequate."

Ayesha was surprised to see the Innkeeper, and for a moment forgot about her worries. So this was the mystery man behind this mysterious dating spot.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," she replied politely. "Your services were excellent, and I was very happy that someone appreciates the universe's needs for romantic getaways."

Lex chuckled at Ayesha's strange focus. He had seen how Ayesha called the Inn a dating spot last time she came. It seemed the teenager's mind was completely focused on romance.

"Alas, even with such romantic places to visit, the heart is left cold and hollow without his warm embrace," Ayesha said as dramatically as she could manage. She even turned away from Lex, as if to hide tears in her eyes. The act would have been quite convincing if Ayesha hadn't caught sight of Little Blue, swimming slowly across the sky. The turtle was using Little Blue's tie as a leash to walk...swim, no

fly? The turtle was using the leash to lead the Whale across the sky and anyone would be stuck in a daze at such a sight.

"That's Little Black, our gardener, and Little Blue, its pet. Why don't I introduce you," Lex said, leading the young girl towards the two animals wearing a smug smile.

Lex had forgotten that he was being silently observed by his bodyguard, who was taking everything in with a lot of interest. He did not understand what this place was, or what the Innkeepers purpose was. Was he just playing around?

But the Innkeeper did not seem like a simple person, there had to be a deeper meaning behind his actions. From what he could tell, he was running some kind of hotel. Maybe this was a kind of cultivation? Or maybe it was some kind of organization? But what was the goal? So far, he had only seen the Innkeeper interact with low leveled cultivators.

Admittedly, the bodyguard was surprised when he saw the Galactic Sovereign turtle, but it was still young and weak. It would be tens of thousands of years before the turtle had any kind of real strength.

"System, scan the Inn for anomalies," the bodyguard said in his mind.

"Sorry host, for the duration of the quest, to maintain the clients privacy, the systems scan capabilities have been sealed."

"Interesting," the bodyguard said once again. He scanned the Inn himself with his spiritual sense, but found nothing out of the ordinary except the Mystery Trial. For some reason, he felt a slight attraction to the Trial, but the attraction was so slight that it clearly meant it had no significant impact on his strength or cultivation.

Intrigued, the bodyguard continued to keep watch over his new client. The bodyguard was patient, and didn't mind waiting to learn more secrets. Afterall, since the quest would forcefully erase his memory that meant that at some point the bodyguard would be exposed to great secrets. He was very curious to see what those secrets were, and if they were worth having a half a bad hair day over.

The Innkeeper

## Chapter 100: Hidden Quest

Lex walked Ayesha to the turtle, entertained by her amazed gaze. The young girl had already forgotten that she was supposed to be sad - or maybe she was hiding it. Lex wondered if he would see her counterpart, the young man. The last time they came, the Inn was comparatively bare. This time the couple would have many more options for their date. Lex especially wanted them to row the small boat on the tiny lake he created. He did not know why, but Lex was looking forward to it.

"Little Black, I'd like to introduce you to a guest. This is Ayesha."

The turtle turned his head towards the little girl, then slowly brought its head down to her level to get a better look at her.

"Hello, little human. How are you today?"

"You can talk?" she gasped in surprise, and then looked at the flying whale with eager eyes. "Can he talk too?"

"Little Blue is shy," said the turtle, looking up at it like a proud parent. "But if you become friends with it, maybe he'll talk to you." The turtle lowered the whale's tie and offered it to her. "Would you like to try?"

Ayesha grabbed onto the tie instantly, and was about to speak when she was whisked off her feet by the whale. The turtle was too heavy for the whale to pull up, but the girl had no choice but to get pulled into the air. At first she let out a surprised scream, but that quickly turned into laughter as the whale pulled her around.

She yelled out to purchase another pair of Icarus' wings and a card appeared in her hand with a picture of the wings on it since her previous ones had been used up. She quickly equipped it and started flying around with the whale, challenging it. She flew in front of it and did a loopy loop, as if showing off. The whale, not to be outdone, started swirling its body as it swam through the air.

The pair flew in between the sky lanterns, using them as obstacles. Lex smiled as he watched them in the air. He immediately took a liking to Ayesha, she was a good kid.

Turning his attention back to the turtle he said, "Little Black, we'll be having a lot of guests coming soon. Make sure no one gets into the greenhouse, it would be a waste if someone ruined all those plants. Also, I'd like it if you could plant vines of Tiffany's treasure all around the Inn. They smell nice."

The turtle looked at him once before turning away, murmuring "silly, silly human" as it went.

Lex didn't mind. He knew the turtle would do as he said. The past few days the turtle and the gardener had done tremendous work, and Lex had gathered a large supply of spirit vegetables, ready to serve his guests. Naturally, anything they ordered that was spirit food would cost more than normal food but he never doubted that they would order it.

Only a short while later, Hera and Will entered the Inn along with her son, Jimmy. The young boy did not look too surprised to be appearing in a random new place, he was hiding behind his mother and holding her hand, focusing on staying close to her.

Lex's eyes lit up when he saw them, more specifically, when he saw Hera. He noticed the last time she came that she had a keen eye and sharp mind. She was helping Will in expanding his Rose Societies operations but Lex felt that her talent was being wasted. This was not a decision he intended to make quickly or lightly, but he kept an eye on her as a potential employee for later on. Eventually when the size of the Inn grew, he would need someone to help him manage certain portions of it. He had to observe how well she managed the Rose Society, and if she performed well it would help his decision.

"Welcome back," he said, approaching them. "I see you brought along a new guest today. I hope you enjoy yourself." Lex smiled, and handed the young boy a piece of chocolate. The chocolate was wrapped in a golden and silver wrapper with the initials MI on it. It was a little something he added to the Inn earlier, so that he could have the system leave chocolate on the guests pillow after the turndown service. The chocolate would automatically taste like whatever chocolate the guest preferred. There was no other benefit to it, but Lex liked the idea.

Jimmy hesitated, but when his mother encouraged him he took the chocolate and nodded at the Innkeeper as thanks.

Lex smiled at the shy boy, before turning his attention back to Hera and Will. "Congratulations are in order, I see you've restarted your cultivation journey," he said to Will. Looking at Will's status Lex could see that he had once again entered the Qi training stage.

"Thank you, I could not have done it without your help and guidance," the old man said sincerely. Only he knew how truly grateful he was to Lex for freeing him from the pain he'd been feeling for the better part of his life.

"It is my duty to help my guests the best I can. Speaking of which, I think you should visit our Guild room. I think you will find it very interesting. You can find it on the Main street."

"I definitely will. I would also like to rent a courtyard for a week. I intend on hosting a few guests here before the event begins."

"Of course, you are most welcome. Velma, please show Will to his courtyard and help him with anything else that he needs."

Velma appeared in the signature Midnight way, which was out of thin air, and led the trio towards the manor. The system naturally charged Will the 1400 MP cost and Lex was not bothered at all by the details of how the transaction took place. He had to say, that was one of his favourite parts about the system. Will and Hera immediately noticed that the environment was different this time around as not only did it look more festive as compared to its usual peaceful appearance, suited guards could be seen walking around in the distance. They were not sure how strong the guards were, but it was easily apparent that they were much stronger than Will's bodyguard Hugo. It seemed the Inn had undergone a lot of changes for the upcoming meeting. They were also more curious about the Guild room now - since a suggestion by the Innkeeper himself could not be simple.

The reason Lex had guided them towards the Guild room was because he knew they wanted to trade and so would find the features of the room helpful. More importantly, Lex would receive 1% of all transactions that occurred in the Guild room so he was completely shameless about promoting it to his guests.

It appeared as though some of his usual guests were arriving a little early and would wait here for the meeting, but Lex did not mind that at all.

A short while later, Alexander and Helen also entered the Inn. Lex was a little surprised to see him without his family, as he was expecting them to come. Perhaps they would join later.

"Welcome back," Lex said warmly, smiling at Helen. It must be said that he had gotten so used to her being at the Inn, the past few days almost felt strange with her gone.

"Thank you, it feels good to be back," she responded. Her response was not perfunctory either. After spending so much time here she had forgotten how dilute the spiritual energy and polluted the air on Earth was. She almost felt suffocated there.

"We'd like to rent a courtyard for the next couple of weeks," Helen said. Although in all technicality Alexander was the one who needed to rent a courtyard for his family, he had achieved Prestige level 3 with his previous transaction at the Gift shop. He felt it would be better if he got others to carry out the following transactions so everyone could raise their prestige level as the perks were very useful.

"Of course," Lex said, summoning one of the newer A.I. staff members to lead the duo. "By the way, you have guests waiting for you in the Guild room - the ones from Vegus Minima."

"They're earlier than we were expecting, I will go see them soon. By the way, my grandfather will be joining us later but he had a question he wanted me to ask. Instead of renting rooms, is it possible to buy a permanent room at the Inn?"

Lex was surprised by the question as he had never considered guests wanting to buy a permanent room, but he supposed the Morrison family's vision was naturally beyond that of ordinary guests. Before he could answer though, he heard the familiar sound of a system notification.

Hidden Quest Activated!