

Inevitability 171

Chapter 171 Rapid Idea

With a resounding thud, the lifeless body crashed to the floor, sending a shockwave through the hearts of Baron Brignais, Louis, and their comrades.

Baron Brignais rose to his feet and beheld the corpse lying at Lumian's feet. He took in the tangle of abundant, disheveled brown hair, the lengthy limbs, and the imposing, robust physique.

It was none other than “Hammer” Ait!

Louis's eyes widened in disbelief at the realization that the treacherous member of the Savoie Mob lay dead on the café floor.

The baron had entrusted the task to Ciel right after dinner, and the hour had not even struck ten.

What's more, Ciel had managed to accomplish the mission before they could deliver the comprehensive intelligence and weaponry that would have enhanced his chances of success.

Moreover, “Hammer” Ait was a true Beyonder, surpassing even Wilson from before in strength. He wasn't as vulnerable as Margot, always surrounded by a retinue of followers. Yet, he had failed to survive three hours after the baron had issued the assignment.

Was this any different from purchasing a pig at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman and slaughtering it?

Even if the baron had taken personal action, it wouldn't have been that effortless or straightforward. It could have even ended in failure.

Louis's gaze shifted from the lifeless body to Ciel's countenance, as if only now did he truly perceive the true nature of this rural novice.

It was somewhat understandable that Margot had fallen prey to him due to carelessness and the poisoned slash. Wilson's defeat could be explained away by his own feebleness and entrapment within the room. However, “Hammer” Ait was a Beyonder whose combat prowess was not significantly inferior to the baron's, and he had always been on high alert against potential assassinations by the Savoie Mob. He wouldn't have been careless.

Yet, Ciel had managed to dispatch such a formidable adversary within a matter of hours!

Just how formidable was he?

What were his limits?

In comparison to the baron, who was the stronger one?

A cascade of questions raced through Louis's mind, and his gaze at Lumian now held a tinge of fear.

The other thugs shared the same unease.

Baron Brignais's gaze constantly shifted between “Hammer” Ait's lifeless form and Lumian's visage, as if searching for any trace of deceit.

Had Lumian Lee effortlessly completed a mission that the baron himself would have considered challenging?

If “Hammer” Ait was so easily dispatched, why had the Savoie Mob, who had long sought to punish the traitor, allowed him to live until now?

This guy is even more terrifying than I had suspected. In terms of strength, intelligence, execution, and seizing opportunities, he is no less capable than I am... He must be concealing some secrets. There's more to him than meets the eye... Baron Brignais barely contained the turmoil within his heart and reclaimed the clarity, rationality, and intelligence he typically boasted.

Baron Brignais's expression turned to stone as he locked eyes with Lumian.

“Does anyone else know that you've taken down 'Hammer' Ait?”

Lumian replied candidly, “Quite a few.”

Baron Brignais's countenance underwent a dramatic shift, losing its refined and confident air.

In that moment, all he wanted was to unleash a torrent of curses upon Lumian.

Is your f*cking brain filled with shit? So many people are aware of your involvement in 'Hammer' Ait's demise, and yet you boldly bring his lifeless body to Salle de Bal Brise, right in front of me?

Do you think that these individuals won't inform 'Black Scorpion' Roger? Do you believe he won't storm into Salle de Bal Brise seeking revenge?

Do you think I can fend off 'Black Scorpion' Roger? Damn it, you're leading me to my own demise!

You better find a bloody corner to hide in at Underground Trier!

Seizing the opportunity presented by Baron Brignais's subdued breathing and silence, Lumian smiled nonchalantly and said, “'Hammer' Ait's subordinates must have found 'Black Scorpion' Roger by now. Only you, Baron, can offer me sufficient protection.

“Baron, weren't you anticipating retaliation from the Poison Spur Mob? That's why you sent me to hunt down one of the trio—Hammer, Baldy, or Short-legged Candlestick?”

Bitterness filled Baron Brignais's mouth at Lumian's question. For a brief moment, he couldn't bring himself to order Lumian to leave.

He had made two plans in preparation for the potential revenge from the Poison Spur Mob. He was confident that he would remain unscathed.

Wouldn't it be a fortuitous outcome if “Giant” Simon and “Rat” Christo met their end?

But the predicament lay in the fact that he hadn't had enough time to implement any of his plans or set them into motion!

His intention was to dispatch the intelligence and weaponry to Auberge du Coq Doré tomorrow morning, and only then would he decide on the course of action. Nonetheless, eliminating any leader of the Poison Spur Mob was no easy feat. It would likely require days of meticulous effort before he could even set foot inside their domain.

Yet, Lumian Lee, that madman, had sought out “Hammer” Ait without delay upon accepting the mission. He wasted no time, conducted no reconnaissance, made no arrangements, and didn't wait for the opportune moment to arise.

What further infuriated the baron was that the fellow had actually succeeded! In a matter of hours, he had slain “Hammer” Ait and dragged the lifeless body to Salle de Bal Brise!

F*ck, is he even human?

This caught him off guard. If “Black Scorpion” Roger were to strike, he might meet his demise alongside “Hammer” Ait.

Observing Baron Brignais's silence and darkened expression, Lumian inwardly chuckled.

He had brought “Hammer” Ait's body to Salle de Bal Brise and presented it to Baron Brignais not to boast or intimidate the gang leader and his henchmen.

His intention was to draw “Black Scorpion” Roger and the other formidable members of the Poison Spur Mob to them!

If Baron Brignais were to fall, a new opportunity would arise. A replacement with sufficient strength would be required. When the time came, Ciel, who could fight, contribute, and had aided Red Boots' lover, would undoubtedly be the most sought-after candidate!

Lumian wasn't overly concerned about whether “Black Scorpion” Roger would kill him.

Mr. K's finger was in his pocket!

Mr. K probably wouldn't mind if I repurposed the finger. After all, I'm doing it to fulfill his mission... Lumian thought casually.

Regardless, the threat from Susanna Mattise wouldn't come anytime soon. He could figure out an alternative approach later. Perhaps Mr. K would reward him with another finger once he saw how well and swiftly Lumian completed the mission?

Baron Brignais's expression underwent several changes. He pushed his chair back abruptly and hurried toward an iron-colored mechanical safe at the café bar counter.

He turned the knob and entered the password.

Lumian watched with a raised eyebrow, puzzled.

What was Baron Brignais planning to retrieve? Was he intending to take the cash and flee?

Or did he possess Sealed Artifacts that he dared not carry with him, fearing their potent negative effects, and had stowed them away in the safe?

Soon enough, Baron Brignais opened the safe and retrieved two bundles of detonators—commonly used in quarries.

Setting a trap to explode “Black Scorpion” Roger? That's quite challenging. He's a Heretic Spellmaster... Lumian refrained from inquiring as he observed Baron Brignais walk toward the wall near Avenue du Marché and push open two glass windows.

The leader of the Savoie Mob placed the bundles of detonators on the windowsill, then lit a match.

Subsequently, he ignited one of the bundles and glanced at the dimly lit Avenue du Marché. Raising his hand, he tossed the explosives into the middle of the road.

Louis and the other mobsters stood in bewilderment, unable to comprehend the baron's intentions.

Lumian's thoughts raced, and he instantly grasped the plan. He couldn't help but inwardly applaud, Very clever...

Boom!

The bundle of detonators exploded in the middle of Avenue du Marché, causing the surrounding glass to rattle.

The few pedestrians on the roadside were startled and fell to the ground, sustaining minor injuries. Some screamed, covering their ears, and frantically sought shelter in nearby locations.

Baron Brignais glanced over, lit another bundle of detonators, and hurled it into the deserted road. Causing casualties would be troublesome aftermath. He didn't wish to attract unwanted attention from authorities.

Boom!

The explosion reverberated once more. The police headquarters on Avenue du Marché, the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, and the God of Steam and Machinery cathedral responded to a certain extent.

Salle de Bal Brise and the occupants of nearby buildings were thrown into disarray, but they dared not venture outside.

Baron Brignais clapped his hands and returned to the wooden table. He pulled a chair over and sat down.

Resuming his usual demeanor, he smiled at Lumian.

“It's all right now.”

This would surely unsettle the police and the clergymen. Some would undoubtedly investigate the cause. It was highly probable that official Beyonders would be among them.

Officers who maintained good relations with the Savoie Mob would inevitably inquire.

Under such circumstances, how could “Black Scorpion” Roger dare to launch an attack?

They couldn't risk assuming that no official Beyonders would care about the explosion. After all, if they lost that bet, they would be doomed!

Lumian hadn't expected Baron Brignais to find a way to elude “Black Scorpion” Roger's assault in such a short span of time. And he had accomplished it using only the resources at hand.

This had momentarily foiled his plan.

True to the reputation of the Savoie Mob's 'brain,' Baron Brignais displays remarkable responsiveness and quick thinking, surpassing even Margot, “Hammer” Ait, and the others in critical moments. Lumian clicked his tongue in acknowledgment, paying no mind to Hammer's lifeless body on the ground. Taking a seat across from Baron Brignais, he flashed a smile.

“I made the wise choice to seek refuge here.”

Baron Brignais nearly choked, his saliva catching in his throat.

Had it not been for his exceptional intellect, he might have been ensnared and faced a grave fate!

Exhaling slowly, Baron Brignais cast a glance at the motionless corpse and addressed Louis and the rest, “Drag it into a private room and conceal it carefully. The authorities will likely come knocking soon.”

Chapter 172 Superintendent

After concealing the body, Baron Brignais nonchalantly addressed Lumian, his curiosity piqued.

“I must say, I'm quite intrigued. How did you manage to eliminate ‘Hammer’ Ait?”

Lumian didn't hold back, revealing everything. He retrieved an empty metal canister and placed it on the table before him.

“What's this?” Baron Brignais examined it carefully for a few moments.

“Remember when I ventured underground earlier today?” Lumian grinned. “I encountered a deviant individual and, quite accidentally, dispatched him. He happened to possess this gaseous sedative and its corresponding antidote.”

“After infiltrating ‘Hammer’ Ait's washroom, I consumed the antidote and patiently awaited his arrival. When he entered, I unscrewed the sedative and engaged him in close combat. I restrained him, preventing his escape until the sedative took effect.”

Baron Brignais pondered for a brief moment, confirming the plausibility of this plan. Satisfied, he nodded and remarked, “The washroom is rather confined, and the gaseous sedative will quickly permeate the space. Moreover, there's no ventilation to speak of. Considering ‘Hammer’ Ait's cautious nature and his guard against our Savoie Mob, he wouldn't offer an easy opportunity for infiltration.”

“The gunmen stationed outside wouldn't dare to open fire, lest they accidentally eliminate ‘Hammer’ Ait. They might even struggle to unlock the restroom door.”

Baron Brignais spoke with such conviction that it seemed he had witnessed the scene firsthand.

Louis and the others silently acknowledged the validity of this analysis.

Having understood the intricacies, they realized that Ciel's ability to dispatch “Hammer” Ait within such a short span of time wasn't as implausible as they had initially thought.

Ciel had indeed discovered a path to success and skillfully utilized the resources at his disposal.

Under this plan, as long as his combat prowess didn't significantly pale in comparison to “Hammer” Ait's, he had a considerable chance of dealing with the traitor.

Naturally, achieving success necessitated strength, a stroke of luck, decisiveness, audacity, and adeptness in gathering intelligence.

Ciel's terror was undeniable, yet it wasn't as horrifying as they had envisioned.

Baron Brignais further commended Lumian's sagacity, albeit slightly displeased that he had transported “Hammer” Ait's lifeless body to Salle de Bal Brise after accomplishing the deed. It had nearly brought calamity upon him.

Nevertheless, Baron Brignais harbored no intention of reprimanding him. Upon reflection, he realized that the fault lay primarily with himself.

It seems I habitually exude an excessive air of confidence and intellect. As if nothing can perplex me. No wonder he assumes that I can provide ample protection and remain unafraid of 'Black Scorpion' Roger.

I even proposed this operation. It's only natural for him to believe that I've already made all necessary preparations.

As they conversed, time slipped away. Before long, a guard from the Savoie Mob stationed at the entrance on the first floor ascended and approached Baron Brignais, conveying a message.

“Please, bring him up.” Baron Brignais stood and made his way toward the staircase.

Travis Everett served as the superintendent at the police headquarters of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. He held one of the highest positions when it came to carrying out tasks. Above him stood a few deputy directors with the rank of chief superintendent, and overseeing everything was the police commissioner of the district.

Baron Brignais enjoyed conversing with Everett. Emperor Roselle's words described him as the epitome of a “Mr. Nice Guy.” He preferred not to delve into the truth, simply hoping for harmonious interactions and a lack of trouble. He possessed a remarkable ability to resolve conflicts between the mobs in the market district.

Ten seconds later, the officer led his two subordinates into the café on the second floor.

Travis Everett appeared to be around 30 years old and stood nearly 1.75 meters tall. His black hair was cropped short, and he wore glasses with relatively large black frames that framed his blue eyes. His chin was slightly broad.

Dressed in a black police uniform, his epaulets showcased five-petaled irises in silver-white against the black background. This indicated his rank as a superintendent. If there were seven petals, he would hold the rank of chief superintendent, and above that, an off-white diamond square.

Travis Everett looked at the smiling Baron Brignais and asked with a stern expression, “What just happened? Please don't tell me there was an explosion at the entrance of Salle de Bal Brise, and you have no idea who did it!”

“Monsieur Superintendent, please have a seat.” Baron Brignais guided Travis Everett to a wooden table and personally pulled out a chair for him.

Lumian, disguising himself as one of the thugs alongside Louis and the others, stood behind Baron Brignais, avoiding direct confrontation with the officers to prevent recognition as a wanted criminal.

Baron Brignais picked up his mahogany pipe and gazed at Travis Everett across from him. With a grave expression, he spoke, “‘Hammer' Ait is dead. I was concerned that 'Black Scorpion' Roger would go into a frenzy, so I detonated the explosives and drew everyone's attention. Rest assured, Monsieur Superintendent, I carefully chose the location of the blast. I didn't harm or seriously injure anyone.”

Travis Everett raised his right hand, adjusted his black-framed glasses, and pointed at Baron Brignais.

“Can you all refrain from causing so much trouble? The parliamentary election is taking place next week. Do you want us to embarrass ourselves in front of our future superior?”

“I don't care about your intentions, nor do I wish to know your motives. All I desire is a peaceful market district.”

“If something similar occurs again, I will propose to Monsieur Aymerck that Bureau 8 and the two Churches form a joint investigative team to handle your Savoie Mob!”

Aymerck served as one of Trier's police commissioners, overseeing Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Travis Everett did not mention the death of “Hammer” Ait directly, but he employed it as a warning to Baron Brignais.

Baron Brignais responded with a smile, “Monsieur Superintendent, fear not. For the next two weeks, we shall strictly adhere to the law. I am merely concerned about the Poison Spur Mob...”

Travis Everett nodded and let out a sigh.

“Emperor Roselle proclaimed that peace brings prosperity. If you do encounter any disputes, you can seek me out for a tribunal.”

He then turned to the two lower-ranking officers beside him and said, “Let us return now and find someone to keep a close watch on the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob. We must ensure they behave.”

The superintendent rose from his seat and extended his arms.

“Praise the Sun!”

“Praise the Sun!” Baron Brignais also stood up, echoing the sentiment.

As Travis Everett and his companions descended the stairs, Lumian muttered quietly to himself, Do people in positions of power always enjoy quoting Emperor Roselle? We lower-class individuals are different. We curse and use crude language as needed. The sense of a sentence doesn't depend on who utters it...

Nearly half an hour later, Baron Brignais turned to Lumian and spoke, “‘Black Scorpion’ Roger and the others should be under surveillance. There is no immediate danger.”

“You may return to Auberge du Coq Doré to rest now. Come here at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow. I will take you to meet the boss.”

“Alright,” Lumian replied with a smile. “Thank you, Baron.”

He then inquired, “According to the rules, since I was the one who killed ‘Hammer’ Ait, all his belongings belong to me, correct?”

“That is correct,” Baron Brignais confirmed, displaying a generous nature when it came to such matters.

He motioned for Louis to bring over the black revolver, bullet bag, bayonet, and stack of intelligence.

“These are yours as well.”

Lumian fastened the holster under his left armpit and stowed away the other items before entering the room where “Hammer” Ait's lifeless body lay.

Ensuring no one was tailing him, he squatted down and unbuttoned the corpse's shirt.

There, he discovered a golden-red ball resembling the morning clouds and sunset, with a faint flickering light dancing within.

This was a Pugilist Beyonder characteristic!

Lumian happily pocketed it and proceeded to search “Hammer” Ait's pockets. He found 116 verl d'or and 17 coppet notes and coins, along with a pair of boxing gloves made of steel-like material, adorned with several sharp spikes.

For Lumian, this bounty far exceeded the satisfaction of hunting Margot.

On his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré, only sporadic gas street lamps illuminated the path. Lumian weaved through the intersecting shadows, sensing pairs of eyes fixated on him.

Is ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger commanding the deceased or using other Beyonder abilities to keep tabs on me? Or am I simply being overly vigilant and imagining things? Lumian muttered, raising his right hand to massage his temples.

He activated his Spirit Vision but found nothing amiss.

The unsettling feeling of being watched gradually faded away.

In the three-story building with a garden at 126 Avenue du Marché.

The imposing “Black Scorpion” Roger, with his piercing deep-blue eyes, and the charming “Baldy” Harman walked back through the door.

The ten members of the Poison Spur Mob, who had been waiting anxiously, felt the air grow tense and their fear heightened. None of them dared to utter a word, as if they were facing an impending storm.

After a tense silence that lasted for more than ten seconds, “Baldy” Harman gritted his teeth and spoke up,

“That Ciel doesn't take us seriously. The Savoie Mob has been provoking us repeatedly. They must pay the price!”

“Black Scorpion” Roger shared Harman's sentiment, feeling equally provoked by Ciel. He spoke in a low, commanding voice,

“We cannot let this matter go unaddressed!”

Phew... Roger exhaled heavily and motioned for the other members of the Poison Spur Mob to leave.

Only Harman remained, and Roger continued, "But we are being targeted by the police. It is highly likely that official Beyonders will be involved. We cannot seek revenge for the time being.

"Brignais is no ordinary opponent. He is cunning and intelligent.

"When Monsieur Artois is elected to parliament, Madame Moon will grant us a new boon. At that time, I will extract Brignais's brain and feed it to the stray dogs!

"However, we cannot remain idle. When the surveillance on us becomes less vigilant, I will seize the opportunity to assassinate Ciel!

"If the Savoie Mob can assassinate our men, then we can do the same to theirs!"

At Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian had just reached Room 207 when he sensed something. He turned his head and directed his gaze towards the nearby balcony.

"Come out," he said with a resigned sigh. "Madame Jenna."

Chapter 173 Intelligence on the Boss

With her hair tied up in a simple bun, Showy Diva emerged from the shadows of the balcony, her eyes adorned with dark shadows and a mole positioned neatly on her nose.

Curiosity evident in her voice, she asked, "How did you discover me? How did you know it was me?"

Being an Assassin, she had mastered the art of utilizing darkness and shadows to conceal her presence. Until now, no one had ever detected her in her previous encounters, making this the first time she had been discovered.

Lumian scoffed in response.

"Next time you plan on assassinating someone, remember not to wear perfume."

After reminding Jenna, he jokingly pointed towards the door of Room 207 and said, "I thought you would enter the room yourself, but instead, you waited so politely on the balcony. It's unlike you."

"Dammit, I've always been polite!" Jenna retorted, feeling a hint of anger at the accusation.

After a brief pause, she muttered, "You're cold, sinister, cunning, and devious. You might have set a trap in the room, waiting for someone to walk into it."

While speaking, Jenna glanced at Lumian and indignantly said, "I understand how you guessed that I'm an Assassin!

"First, you connected the dots from the perfect infiltration route I provided. Then, you deliberately probed me. F*ck, if I had been calmer, you would have said, 'Haha, I'm joking.'"

“Madame Jenna, your reflex arc is a little long,” Lumian laughed.

“What 'Madame' or 'Miss.' You're not one to be polite either. Just call me Jenna,” she controlled her urge to curse and curiously asked, “What's a reflex arc?”

She had a feeling it wasn't something favorable, but she couldn't quite grasp its meaning.

Miss, did you complete your compulsory education? Lumian criticized. As he opened the door, he casually explained, “For instance, you, Franca, Baron Brignais, and 'Hammer' Ait hear me telling a joke simultaneously. Franca and Baron Brignais burst into laughter instantly, but it takes you a whole day to find me and say, 'Haha, how funny.’”

“Dammit! You bastard!” Jenna finally realized she had been mocked.

Following Lumian into Room 207, she asked in confusion, “What about 'Hammer' Ait? Why isn't he laughing?”

Lumian turned his head and solemnly glanced at her.

“Dead people don't laugh.”

Jenna was momentarily taken aback before she burst into laughter, her body swaying slightly.

“You, haha, you truly have a sense of humor..” She intermittently expressed amidst her laughter.

Lumian ignited the carbide lamp in the room and settled on the edge of the bed. He inquired, “What brings you to Auberge du Coq Doré?”

“I've come to retrieve my gun!” Jenna shut the door behind her and dragged over the old, worn armchair. Placing it in front of her, she sat down, resting her elbows on the backrest.

Her eyes sparkled with curiosity she couldn't conceal.

“But don't tell me how you did it just yet. Let me take a guess.

“You... asked me about the size of the washroom. That means you intended to exploit the environment there.

“F*ck! I've got it, I've got it! You have that pervert's sedative on hand. It's perfect for a place like the washroom. It's like trapping a pigeon!

“Dammit, I can imagine 'Hammer' Ait's desperate expression as he struggled, realizing his strength was dwindling. The thugs outside couldn't enter, and they didn't dare to shoot randomly...”

The more Jenna spoke, the more animated she became, as if she were the one who had carried out the assassination of “Hammer” Ait.

“At least you have some wits about you,” Lumian begrudgingly acknowledged.

“Heh!” Jenna waved her hand and peered at Lumian. “What I can't figure out is why you weren't affected by the sedative. Did you smell that bottle of 'shit' beforehand? Can its effects last that long?”

Lumian simply smiled.

“I recall something you once said. Avoid seeing what I shouldn't, hearing what I shouldn't, and asking questions I shouldn't.”

“...” Jenna glared at Lumian in frustration and refrained from further probing.

Lumian produced her compact revolver and tossed it to her.

Jenna caught it deftly and let out a chuckle.

“You didn't even dare to come up to me and return it in person?”

She smacked her lips and clicked her tongue.

“Is there something about me that frightens you?”

In that moment, she felt as if she had returned to teasing Lumian when they first met.

Lumian appraised her.

“You're quite audacious to enter a male stranger's room dressed like this in the middle of the night.”

Jenna was dressed as she typically would for her evening performances. Her white blouse revealed a generous amount of her chest, and her off-white fluffy short skirt didn't provide much coverage as her legs spread on either side of the backrest.

Jenna deliberately covered her mouth and let out a soft chuckle.

“I was defenseless down in the underground, yet you didn't make a move, let alone now.”

“Do you still hold onto your virginity? Need some help? A mature and beautiful sister can show you the wonders of the adult world.”

As she spoke, she intentionally lowered her body, revealing her cleavage to Lumian.

Lumian didn't flinch and observed calmly.

Who would be frightened by such a thing?

Jenna's expectation of a fleeting gaze and a flushed expression from Lumian gradually transformed into discomfort.

She sat up straight and muttered, “Lame, coward...”

In the next instant, Lumian stood up abruptly.

Jenna's expression underwent a sudden change.

“What are you planning to do?”

Lumian's lips curled into a smirk as he turned toward the wooden table.

“Just pouring some light beer. Fancy a glass?”

Auberge du Coq Doré didn't offer the option of boiling water. The tenants either drank tap water or resorted to light beer as a substitute.

“...No, thanks.” Jenna let out a relieved sigh.

Lumian took a few swigs of light beer and redirected the conversation.

“How can you be so certain that you're older than me?”

“I saw your wanted poster at Franca's. Well, hello there, Lumian. You're not even 18 yet, while I've already reached 21!” Jenna's satisfaction started to surface.

“Is your mental age only 12?” Lumian taunted before inquiring, “How did you come to know the infiltration route to that room?”

Franca had long harbored the desire to carry out an assassination against the Poison Spur Mob?

Jenna pursed her lips and replied, “I've been gathering intelligence for nearly a month, awaiting the perfect opportunity to assassinate Margot. But you beat me to it.”

Margot had previously overseen the Salle de Gristmill.

“Do you hold a grudge against Margot?” Lumian asked.

“He didn't do anything to me.” Jenna lowered her gaze slightly. “When I first arrived in the market district, searching for singing opportunities in various dance halls, I encountered another Showy Diva singer. She was a few years older than me and took me under her wing. She even helped refine my singing and guided me towards a chance to perform. Over a month ago, Margot violated her. F*cking dammit, did he think all Showy Divas were open for his taking? Afterwards, she left the market district. I later heard she was committed to an asylum...”

“That was when I pleaded with Franca to obtain Beyonder powers and assist her.”

Lumian fell silent for a few moments before speaking again.

“You see, one mustn't hesitate. When I made up my mind to kill Margot that morning, I carried out the deed that very night.”

Jenna found herself both enraged and entertained.

“Well, everyone has their own style!”

Lumian changed the subject.

“Tomorrow morning, Baron Brignais will take me to meet the Boss. Do you have any insights on what kind of person he is?”

Jenna pondered for a moment before responding.

“I've never met him personally, but I've heard Franca mention a few things.

“He resides in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. He's a bit of a pervert and has a fondness for women, but he's not twisted. His tastes are quite f*cking normal, and every one of his partners matches Franca's preferences.

“He's a merchant by trade. He owns a depot near the steam locomotive station and holds significant shares in the nearby Rist docks. He also runs a freight company and a construction firm, providing employment opportunities for many Savoyards.

“You might not know this, but when the Poison Spur Mob first gained power, they had a major conflict with the Savoie Mob. All the laborers from the depot and the dock workers took to the streets. It was like a protest!”

A considerable number of people. If armed, they could form an army... Lumian motioned for Jenna to continue.

Jenna pulled her collar up slightly.

“Franca mentioned that he's quite amiable, even with common laborers. Don't be deceived by his appearance. His goal is to make others drop their guard around him.

He's cunning and highly intelligent. He enjoys playing mind games with others. Don't provoke him, or Franca won't be able to protect you.

“He wields significant power. It seems he's adept at fire manipulation and possesses some mystical artifact.”

Adept at fire manipulation... A Sequence 7 Pyromaniac of the Hunter pathway? No, Franca mentioned that he's incredibly powerful, and Franca is likely a Sequence 7 Witch of the Demoness pathway. If she made such an assessment, it's probable that the boss of the Savoie Mob is more than just a Sequence 7...

The Poison Spur Mob's “Black Scorpion” Roger is the boss with a boon equivalent to a Sequence 7. A Heretic Spellmaster might not necessarily defeat a Witch. Franca could easily be a mob boss herself, yet she willingly becomes this person's mistress. I wonder if she has ulterior motives or if his strength and background truly surpass Franca's? Lumian's thoughts raced as he analyzed the situation.

Jenna stood up.

“You better dress like a man tomorrow. Don't be like Baron Brignais. The Boss prefers aggressive subordinates who resemble wolfdogs.”

“Is that so...” Lumian scoffed. “I'm afraid I'll appear overly aggressive.”

Jenna rolled her eyes.

“That's right. You saved my life, yet there are times when I can't help but want to slap you!

“Anyway, don't go too far.”

She reattached her holster to her calf and headed towards the door, yawning openly.

“I'm heading back now. Sigh, I won't be able to perform at the Salle de Gristmill for the time being.

“Why do you still live in such a lousy room?”

Although her own accommodations weren't great either, they were still much better than Auberge du Coq Doré.

Lumian smirked once again.

“This is my turf.”

“Heh!” Jenna didn't say anything further. She entered the dimly lit corridor and vanished from sight.

Lumian freshened up and settled into bed. Thoughts of meeting the boss of the Savoie Mob the next day gradually lulled him into sleep.

Chapter 174 Reward

At half past ten in the morning on the following day, Baron Brignais rendezvoused with Lumian on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian had chosen a simple attire for the day, donning a linen shirt, a black waistcoat, and brown trousers. His cuffs were rolled up to his elbows, and he sported a wide-brimmed, brown hat.

This ensemble lent him an air of casualness, almost uncouth.

Baron Brignais observed it for a few moments but refrained from commenting. Instead, he merely reminded Lumian,

“Once we meet the Boss, it's best to keep your words to a minimum.”

“Understood,” Lumian replied, tipping his wide-brimmed hat.

Accompanied by Lumian alone, Baron Brignais did not bring Louis and the others. He led Lumian downstairs and directed him towards a four-seater carriage awaiting them at the entrance.

Within half an hour, the carriage navigated through Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative and halted on a comparably tranquil street.

The terrain in this area stood higher than its surroundings. Detached villas, predominantly white, beige, and grayish-blue, dotted the landscape. Each boasted a front lawn and a rear garden enclosed by barbed iron fences.

Lumian's gaze scanned the street signs, revealing the name Rue des Fontaines.

Following Baron Brignais, Lumian arrived at 11 Rue des Fontaines and watched as the baron pulled on the rope hanging beside the gated entrance.

Before long, a valet of Southern Continent origin approached and opened the iron gates.

“Monsieur Martin awaits you in his study,” the dark-skinned valet remarked, his tone laced with arrogance.

Without waiting for Baron Brignais and Lumian's response, the valet turned on his heel and strolled along a cement path flanked by two green lawns spacious enough for three carriages.

After crossing the lawns, Lumian and Baron Brignais reached the grayish-white three-story villa.

The villa's door swung open, revealing a man in a black suit and a dark bow tie—typical butler attire—standing in the doorway.

Baron Brignais hastened his steps and greeted the man with a smile.

“Good morning, Faustino.”

“Good morning, Brignais,” Faustino, a man in his fifties, replied with a smile.

Baron Brignais introduced him to Lumian, saying, “This is Monsieur Martin's butler, Monsieur Faustino.”

Lumian greeted Faustino in the usual manner, maintaining proper decorum.

Faustino nodded and offered no further words. Leading them through a hallway adorned with a resplendent crystal chandelier, resembling a dance floor, he guided them into a room lined with bookshelves.

Along the way, Lumian surveyed his surroundings, noting an array of oil paintings and an assortment of weapons adorning the walls—single-handed swords, broadswords, hammers, spears, and short bows. The half-tall wooden platform that ought to have showcased vases and sculptures was instead occupied by silver-white suits of armor, stirrups, breastplates, and other items.

Behind the desk, positioned beside the floor-to-ceiling windows, stood a man who measured nearly 1.8 meters in height.

His hair, typical black as found in Intis, exhibited a few silver strands near his temples. He appeared to be in his early forties, possessed strong facial features, and his slightly reddened eyes contrasted with his otherwise brown irises.

The man possessed full cheeks that contrasted with his sharply defined features. Wrinkles were conspicuously absent from his countenance, and he exuded a relatively amiable temperament. He resembled a businessman who would effortlessly flash a smile before uttering a single word.

In that moment, he wore a white shirt and a formal black suit, devoid of a bow tie or necktie.

“Good morning, Monsieur Martin,” Baron Brignais's expression turned respectful.

After Lumian offered his greetings, Gardner Martin smiled and let out a sigh.

“So young, aren't you?”

“I'm beginning to understand Emperor Roselle's words: Heroes often exhibit a different demeanor from others when they are young. Should I address you as Lumian or Ciel?”

“Ciel,” Lumian replied respectfully.

As Gardner Martin strolled away from the floor-to-ceiling windows, he offered warm praise,

“In just a week, you've slain two Sequence 8 Beyonders and gravely injured a Sequence 9. I couldn't have achieved such feats at your age. What's your Sequence?”

“Sequence 8, Provoker,” Lumian responded candidly.

Gardner Martin expressed great satisfaction with Lumian's frankness. He nodded and remarked, “What I said earlier wasn't quite comprehensive. When I was a Sequence 8, I couldn't have accomplished what you did. Very well. Our Savoie Mob could use an exceptional lad like you.”

Without waiting for Lumian's reply, he proceeded to ask, “Did you find anything noteworthy on 'Hammer' Ait?”

This person is aware of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Conservation? Judging by his demeanor, even if he isn't aware of conservation, he believes that human Beyonders are akin to Beyonder creatures. They manifest Beyonder characteristics upon death, or some residual parts or ingredients that can be employed in potion brewing... Lumian contemplated for a moment and withheld nothing. From his pocket, he produced a fist-sized sphere resembling the morning clouds and the evening sun.

“I found this.”

Gardner Martin regarded it with approval.

“Excellent. Sell it to me. It holds no value for you. How about 18,000 verl d'or?”

That's considerably higher than the 15,000 verl d'or at Mr. K's Gathering... Lumian pretended to be unaware of the exact price of the Beyonder characteristics.

“Is it truly worth 18,000 verl d'or?”

Baron Brignais, standing beside Lumian, couldn't fathom what peculiar object had prompted his boss to offer such a sum.

Something from 'Hammer' Ait? An ingredient employed for advancement? Or do Beyonders resemble Beyonder creatures? Baron Brignais entertained numerous speculations in an instant.

He suddenly regretted agreeing to surrender all of 'Hammer' Ait's possessions to Ciel the previous night in order to preserve his dignity.

“Haha,” Gardner Martin boisterously chuckled. “It is indeed precious, but I'm offering a premium. Consider it your reward.”

He then turned to Butler Faustino and instructed, “Go and fetch 18,000 in cash. Avoid denominations that are too large.”

Lumian harbored no objections to selling the Pugilist Beyonder characteristic to Martin. He had intended to sell it at Mr. K's gathering.

His hope was to amass funds to acquire a mystical item capable of countering adverse effects, compensating for his lack of mysticism means or serving as a disguise.

Taking the Pugilist Beyond character from Ciel and toying with it for a few seconds, Gardner Martin addressed Baron Brignais, "Despite Ciel's tender age, he has already rendered significant services to our Savoie Mob and possesses remarkable strength. It is time for him to assume more substantial responsibilities."

"Yes... You are already burdened with the usury business and the other shops on Avenue du Marché. It is no easy task. Get Ciel to assist you in managing Salle de Bal Brise. Allocate some personnel to support him, so he doesn't have to rely solely on himself."

Baron Brignais's facial muscles twitched ever so slightly. He suppressed his discontent and disappointment and replied, "Very well, Monsieur Martin."

Salle de Bal Brise was a veritable goldmine, and he was reluctant to let go of it.

If not for Monsieur Martin's direct order, he would have chosen to hand over the Avenue du Marché business to Ciel and suggested transferring some of the henchmen from "Giant" Simon and "Blood Palm" Black.

Lumian sensed the strain in his relationship with Baron Brignais. He couldn't deceive him as effortlessly as before.

There might even be clashes and conflicts in the future!

Gardner Martin turned to Lumian and instructed, "Take good care of Salle de Bal Brise. If you perform well, I will entrust you with more significant ventures."

"Thank you, Monsieur Martin," Lumian replied, lowering his head and feigning delight.

On the way back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Baron Brignais seemed to regain his composure. He engaged in occasional conversations with Lumian regarding the Savoie Mob, displaying politeness, courtesy, and refinement.

Lumian was more preoccupied with the small cloth bag brimming with 18,000 verl d'or.

With that sum, he could acquire a modest apartment in Quartier de l'Observatoire!

In the Dariège region, it was akin to owning a villa in a decent neighborhood.

Upon entering Salle de Bal Brise, Louis and the others approached Lumian.

Before they could speak, Baron Brignais drew from his mahogany pipe and announced,

"Louis, Sarkota, from this day forth, follow Ciel. He is now in charge of Salle de Bal Brise."

Louis, whose forehead bruises had mostly faded, and Sarkota, whose brownish-red hair exhibited slight natural curls, revealed expressions of shock and confusion.

They were aware that Ciel would be rewarded, but they never anticipated him taking over Salle de Bal Brise and themselves being assigned to him.

He was now a true leader of the Savoie Mob!

Ignoring his subordinates' reactions, Baron Brignais smiled at Lumian and stated, "Leave me an office on the second floor. I require it for the usury business."

"Very well," Lumian responded without objection.

After a brief handover, Baron Brignais led two thugs to address some trouble concerning the usury business. Lumian ascended to the second floor, intending to inquire about Salle de Bal Brise's operations.

Louis leaned in, speaking in a hushed tone. "Ciel, I mean, Boss, Red Boots is in your office. I wonder if she's here for you or the baron. Would you like to meet her?"

"Red Boots" Franca? Lumian nodded subtly.

"Where is my office?"

Louis hurriedly guided his new boss through the café and into the corridor on the second floor, reaching a room at the end.

"Right here." He indicated, pointing to the dark red wooden door.

Lumian nodded, grasped the handle, and pushed the door open.

The first thing that greeted his eyes were a pair of vibrant red boots, elegantly placed on a brown wooden desk.

Adorning the boots were a pair of off-white breeches, and higher still, a white blouse for ladies adorned with a multitude of embroidered flowers and vine-like patterns on the cuffs and collar. Over it, she wore a slender black and white checkered vest.

Continuing upward, Lumian's gaze fell upon a graceful, smooth neck, followed by lips painted a delicate shade of red. A sharp, refined nose, eyebrows that arched toward the temples, and eyes sparkling with a vibrant, cheerful lake-like hue completed the picture. Her long flaxen hair was artfully tied up in a high ponytail.

Seated upon a swivel chair that had once belonged to Baron Brignais, "Red Boots" Franca nonchalantly rested her feet on the edge of the desk, as if it were her own personal territory.

Chapter 175 Hidden Blade

Lumian stepped into the room, shutting the door behind him, the dark red wood closing off the outside world. He turned to Franca and asked, "Are you here to see the baron or me?"

Franca leaned back in the chair, stretching her body.

However, the swivel chair tilted slightly, leaving the ground and wobbling uncertainly.

"Care to guess why I'm here? For you or him?" Her voice cut through the air, clear and distinct, in stark contrast to her elegant appearance and demeanor. "Gardner initially wanted you to be Brignais's deputy, to see if you were capable of handling more than just fighting. I told him then that Brignais hasn't been very obedient lately."

Lumian nodded, a sudden realization dawning on him. Aurore was right. A comment made in bed could play a significant role...

His confusion from earlier, on Rue des Fontaines, began to dissipate. How could the boss be so generous as to take away one of Baron Brignais's most prized "property" and hand it over to an outsider like him?

Salle de Bal Brise was the most popular dance hall in the entire market district!

Initially, Lumian had contemplated mocking Franca's masculine sitting posture, but the thought of her true gender made him reconsider. He clicked his tongue and remarked, "So, I should be thanking you?"

"No need for that. After all, you saved Jenna," Franca replied, smiling as she shook her right foot on her left ankle. "I came here for two reasons. First, I wanted to assure you that I understand the distinction between kindness and animosity. I will surely repay kindness. Second, I wanted to warn you not to harbor any intentions toward Jenna."

The latter half of her sentence carried a clear warning that she would seek revenge for any offense. Lumian couldn't help but chuckle.

"Are you lacking confidence? If you manage to make Jenna infatuated with you, nothing I do will change her feelings."

Had Lumian not known about the potential gender transformation through the Demoness pathway, he might have taunted Franca, asking if her confidence solely relied on her dick. He might have mocked her insecurity and her need to caution an unrelated individual. What did she think Jenna was? Someone who would easily change her heart? Lumian could almost visualize Jenna treating Franca as a friend rather than a lover.

Gradually, Franca's smile faded. She withdrew her feet and rose from her chair.

Despite being slightly shorter than Lumian, she stood at an impressive height of almost 1.75 meters, a rarity among Intisian women.

Franca circled the desk, drawing closer to Lumian. A smirk formed on her lips as she said, "If you're in need of women, I can introduce you to some of my top dancers. And if they don't catch your fancy, how about me?"

As she spoke, she gently hooked her hand around Lumian's chin, lowering it slowly.

Lumian's heart remained calm, undisturbed like a still lake. The realization that this woman may have once been a man had extinguished any desire within him. He simply resisted, firmly gripping Franca's right hand and offering a smile.

"I'm afraid the boss would have me sleeping with the fishes at the bottom of the Srenzo River."

Changing the topic, Lumian continued, "So, you swing both ways? Men and women?"

Franca withdrew her hand, straightened up, and offered a smile.

“I used to fancy girls exclusively, but after giving it a try with a man, I realized it's not half bad. It brings about a different sensation.

“Life's too short to impose limits upon oneself. Break free from unnecessary restrictions and explore. You'll have more fun and live a truly different life.”

It seems as if Franca had indeed been a man in the past. Is she now a Sequence 7 Witch? And why did her last sentence sound so familiar? In the midst of his pondering, Lumian responded to Franca,

“I don't hold any special feelings for Jenna, nor do I intend to. I have far more pressing matters to attend to.”

“Very well.” Franca strode toward the door.

Just as her hand reached for the handle, Lumian's memory was suddenly jogged, and he finally recalled the source of Franca's words.

It had been mentioned by Aurore in his dream!

She spoke of a member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society who had contemplated the idea of becoming an Assassin and had consumed the corresponding potion. However, at the Witch Sequence, he found himself in a quandary, unsure whether to undergo a gender transformation. Another member of the society had advised him, saying, “Life is short, why not give it a try?”

It was the very essence of what Franca had condensed into those words!

Lumian's heart stirred as he gazed upon Franca's graceful figure. He spoke in a deep, resonant voice, “Life is short, why not give it a try?”

Franca's hand froze on the doorknob, and she stood there, as if struck by lightning.

After a few seconds, she spun around, locking her gaze with Lumian's, her voice tinged with anxiety.

“Who are you? What's your code name?”

This reaction... It appears my guess was correct! Lumian felt a surge of delight followed by a sinking feeling in his heart.

“I'm Muggle's brother.”

Upon hearing Ciel accurately mention the code name of one of the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Franca breathed a sigh of relief and said,

“I'm not sure if your sister mentioned me, but my code name is Hidden Blade. I belong to the same secret organization as her. No, she must have mentioned me! Otherwise, you wouldn't be familiar with that phrase. Damn it all, what the hell is happening!”

Lumian shut his eyes and spoke with a resolute tone, “She never mentioned your code name or identity because I chose the Hunter pathway. When she reminded me about the neighboring Demoness pathway and its potential for gender transformation, she used your experience as an example.”

“So, you do know...” Franca felt a strong urge to disappear into the depths of the sewers.

Despite having adapted to her current form and overcoming her self-imposed limitations, her newfound enjoyment with men was contingent upon her previous gender remaining a secret.

The notion that Ciel knew about her past as a man, and her penchant for intimate relations with men, ignited a dangerous thought within her.

The dead can keep secrets... The dead will forget... The dead won't mock me...

After a few seconds, Franca let out a slow exhale and said, “It would be wise for you to forget this. If you weren't Muggle's brother, I would have ensured your permanent disappearance.”

At that moment, she projected her true, masculine side, casting her gaze toward the future.

“Let me enlighten you about the Hunter pathway. It, too, involves a gender change. I paid a steep price to acquire this knowledge. Unlike Demonesses, Hunters transition from women to men. It likely occurs at Sequence 4. When the time comes, I will switch paths, become a Hunter, and reclaim my male form!”

Is that so... Hunters symbolize males, while Demonesses represent females? No wonder they are neighboring paths... Lumian restrained his emotions and let out a chuckle.

“When that time arrives, how will you face the men you were once intimately involved with?”

Franca's expression turned smug as she unveiled her well-devised plan.

“I will administer them the Witch potion. If they are Beyonders unable to transition to the Demoness pathway, I will find a way to transform the characteristics of a Witch Bounded characteristic into mystical items for them to wear. And then, when the time is ripe, hehe...”

Madame, you're somewhat deranged... Lumian dared not further provoke the Red Boots.

This individual seemed capable of anything!

As he expected, Franca issued a threat, “I'll emphasize once again, it's in your best interest to forget about this matter and refrain from harboring any intentions toward Jenna. Otherwise, I will apprehend you and force the Witch potion down your throat! Though Sequence 7 may not grant the ability to switch pathways, it does make one even more dangerous. It might not result in half-crazed madness or loss of control.”

Visualizing such a scenario, Lumian hastened to nod and made a solemn pledge, “You are my sister's friend. I will surely keep your secret.”

Franca relaxed and inquired about Muggle, “Where is Muggle? Is she also in Trier? Is she strikingly beautiful in reality?”

Lumian fell into silence. After a few seconds, he spoke in a hoarse voice, “She passed away. You must have seen the wanted posters. In that calamity, she...”

Franca parted her lips, but no words escaped them.

She returned to Lumian's side and gently patted his shoulder, offering solace.

After a moment, Franca dabbed at the corners of her eyes and spoke, "Ever since I became a woman, it seems my tear ducts have become more active... I can't fathom that Muggle departed from us so suddenly. Whenever we gathered, she exuded gentleness, brilliance, humor, and kindness. Though I've never laid eyes on her true form, I believe she must be incredibly beautiful..."

With a regained composure, Lumian gazed at Franca and said, "Madame Hidden Blade, I request that you keep this matter under wraps for the time being. Do not divulge it to other members of your organization. It could impact my investigation into the truth behind the catastrophe."

In a slightly nasal tone, Franca replied, "No problem."

Lumian observed Franca's shimmering eyes resembling tranquil lakes and contemplated before posing his next question, "How many encounters did you have with my sister over the past year?"

"Only once. Why do you ask?" Franca inquired, puzzled.

Lumian continued, "Did she exhibit any peculiar behavior or interact with any unusual individuals?"

"No," Franca shook her head. "It was a regular gathering where we exchanged knowledge of mysticism and traded items. We belong to different factions—she's part of the Academy, and I am affiliated with the Sanctuary. Our gatherings rarely coincide."

Lumian refrained from further inquiries. Seeking to gain something from the situation, he spoke with a mindset of extracting information, "Madame Hidden Blade, I am currently studying the grimoire left behind by my sister, but there are numerous sections that elude my understanding. Might I seek your guidance?"

"Certainly," Franca disclosed her address. "I reside in the penthouse at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Room 601. You can find me during Jenna's performances. Every evening, unless I am at Rue des Fontaines or visiting various dance halls, I will be at home. Also, please refrain from using my code name. Just refer to me as Franca."

Why does it feel like we're engaged in a clandestine affair behind Jenna's back... Lumian criticized inwardly, feeling perplexed. He voiced his puzzlement, "Franca, you possess the backing of that secret organization, and you are not lacking in strength yourself. Why did you join the mob?"

Franca grinned and playfully winked her left eye. "Secret."

Chapter 176 Property

After bidding farewell to Franca, Lumian led Louis and Sarkota back to the café and settled himself into Baron Brignais's usual spot.

Already awaiting him was René, the manager of Salle de Bal Brise.

In his forties, René had a gaunt face, leaving one to wonder if he was overworked or simply born that way. His light-yellow hairline was receding in a manner similar to the people from Loen.

Despite being an executive directly appointed by Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob, René treated Lumian with utmost respect and wore an ingratiating smile.

“Monsieur Ciel, would you care to learn more about the dance hall?”

“Very well.” Lumian reached out to take the stack of reports from René and perused them with unwavering focus.

Standing behind him, Louis and Sarkota couldn't help but feel like they hardly knew their leader at all once more.

Lumian, a young man hailing from the countryside, possessed an understanding of complex financial statements that was far beyond their comprehension.

They would have been left feeling dizzy and yearning for sleep had they been tasked with such a feat.

Can this man both fight and possess a cultured mind? Louis diverted his gaze from the reports, which seemed to possess some kind of “supernatural effect.”

René seized the opportunity to acquaint Lumian with the workings of Salle de Bal Brise.

“On weekdays, we earn a daily income ranging from 1,200 to 1,800 verl d'or. On weekends, that figure can reach as high as 5,000 verl d'or. Typically, it hovers around 4,000...”

“Last year, our total income amounted to 645,425 verl d'or and 37 coppet. This year, there has been a slight increase based on current trends, but nothing significant...”

“We require 12 bouncers, 4 bartenders, 6 waiters, 3 chefs, 6 kitchen helpers, 3 handy-men, 3 dishwashers, 4 cleaners, 1 waiter supervisor, 3 finance staff, 3 alcohol and food procurers, and a carriage driver... Their average annual salary is 1,000 verl d'or. We also provide them with complimentary lunch and dinner, which costs us a total of 53,000 verl d'or.

“As the manager, my annual salary, along with the year-end dividend, amounts to about 7,000 verl d'or.

“As per our agreement with Red Boots, each dancer receives a base salary of 1 verl d'or per day... When they strike a deal with a guest, we take 30%... Transactions usually occur in the rooms on the upper two floors of the dance hall. If they wish to leave, they must settle the fee with the bouncer or the waiter supervisor at the door in advance...”

“Wine, champagne, beer, brandy, sugar alcohol, absinthe, and various flavors of soda, along with ice and other ingredients, cost us approximately 120,000 verl d'or per year...

“We've already purchased this establishment, so there's no additional rent to be paid...

“When coupled with expenses for horse care, venue maintenance, gas, tap water, singers, and the band, our annual costs sum up to around 230,000 verl d'or...

“Out of the remaining 310,000 verl d'or, the Boss will claim 100,000 verl d'or. We'll also need 100,000 verl d'or to establish a favorable relationship with the officers at the police headquarters. Monsieur Ciel, you're left with approximately 110,000 verl d'or. This needs to cover your personal expenses, firearm and ammunition supplies, rewards for your subordinates, as well as compensation for the victims and the injured...

“Sadly, the income of the people in the market district isn't particularly high; otherwise, we could generate more revenue from alcohol and beverages...”

Inwardly, he couldn't help but let out a sigh.

A mob leader with a profitable enterprise certainly rakes in substantial wealth!

According to newspapers, magazines, and the information collected by his sister Aurore, the annual salary of a minister in Intis amounted to a mere 100,000 verl d'or. Although the government provided free housing, basic household items, silverware, and two private carriages, expenses for personal servants and banquets fell on their own pockets.

Of course, Lumian had to reward his subordinates on occasion and allocate funds for compensations and ammunition in case of conflicts. However, there was no need for extravagant living, hiring servants, or hosting lavish banquets.

All in all, he earned a sum similar to that of a minister.

The only difference was that ministers didn't rely solely on their public salaries for income.

On the other hand, laborers received an annual salary of around 700 verl d'or, while maids earned approximately 480 verl d'or. Construction workers fared only slightly better, with an annual salary of 1,000 verl d'or. Skilled workers brought in a meager 2,500 verl d'or per year, while senior engineers ranged between 10,000 and 20,000 verl d'or annually.

Indeed, the “shortcut” to wealth is written within the laws themselves... No wonder Brignais couldn't bear to let go of this dance hall... Lumian recollected a comment his sister had made.

By saving money and taking care of his subordinates, preventing them from recklessly rushing into battles, he had enough left over each year to purchase a Sequence 6 potion formula and even the corresponding primary ingredients!

Once René finished speaking, Lumian nodded and posed a question, “Why provide the dancers with a base salary?”

It wasn't that he was reluctant to part with the funds, but rather out of curiosity.

“The dancers under our Savoie Mob are under the control of Red Boots. She insists on a base salary, allowing the dancers to opt-out of additional jobs. If they wish to earn less, they earn less. If they choose to starve, they starve,” René explained. “Apart from Red Boots's dancers, there are also women who are controlled by figures from the usury business. In the past, Baron Brignais had authority over them all, so there wasn't any conflict. How should we coordinate matters now?”

Thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, leading him to notice the resemblances between Franca and his sister Aurore.

Could it be because they are part of the same secret organization? However, if it were Aurore, she would have approached it differently. She would have organized protests among the dancers, established an underground school to educate them, and sought alternative paths... If it were me, what would I do? After pondering for a moment, Lumian raised his gaze and addressed René, Louis, and the others.

“For now, let us maintain the current state of affairs. René, assist me in dealing with the police officers during this period. Once I acquaint myself better with our surroundings, I shall engage in fruitful discussions with them.”

After altering the passwords of the two mechanical safes and informing Manager René of one as per the established protocol, Lumian made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré before lunchtime.

He proceeded directly to the fifth floor and rapped on Charlie's door.

Charlie, who was enjoying a light beer with a nibble of baguette, caught sight of Ciel as soon as he opened the door.

He exclaimed happily, “Where have you been these past couple of days? You didn't even show up at the bar for a drink.”

Lumian inquired, “There's a job opportunity. Would you be interested?”

“What kind of job?” Charlie worriedly contemplated his diminishing savings and the bleak prospects of finding new employment.

With a smile, Lumian responded, “How about working as a waiter at Salle de Bal Brise? You don't have to join the Savoie Mob. You'll earn 70 verl d'or per month. You can keep the tips, but be aware that folks in the market district aren't inclined to tip unless you become a woman and are willing to engage with them intimately. Yes, there are also female patrons who seek out waiters for such purposes. You're experienced in that domain, so there's no need for further elaboration.”

“Salle de Bal Brise?” Charlie's eyes widened. “Have you already gained Baron Brignais's trust?”

To be able to arrange for someone to work as a waiter at Salle de Bal Brise without joining the Savoie Mob!

Lumian simply maintained his smile.

"I don't need Baron Brignais's approval. Salle de Bal Brise is now under me."

"Huh?" Charlie questioned his own hearing.

Lumian clarified, still smiling, "After I eliminated 'Hammer' Ait, the Savoie Mob's leader handed over Salle de Bal Brise to me."

"Is that so?" Charlie had an epiphany before blurting out in astonishment, "You took down 'Hammer' Ait as well?"

Lumian nodded. "Don't disclose this to anyone. I fear the police might come knocking."

"..." Charlie was at a loss for words.

After a few seconds, he mumbled, "Perhaps those Poison Spur Mob fellows should pay a visit to the nearby cathedral and pray, see if their luck can change. Ever since you arrived in the market district, their leaders have been dropping like flies. I can't fathom how they must be feeling now."

"Great idea," Lumian commended.

If the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob had the audacity to pray in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the cathedral of the God of Steam and Machinery, the mob would cease to exist.

Of course, Lumian didn't want them to act so foolishly before Louis Lund visited again.

Charlie pondered for a moment and responded, "Alright, I'll head over to Salle de Bal Brise in the afternoon. Who should I ask for? Haha, I rarely get to visit the dance hall because I'm always short on cash. Now I can go there every day."

"Just find Manager René and let him know you're a tenant at Auberge du Coq Doré," Lumian replied simply, his gaze shifting to the side.

There were two cleaning ladies nearby. One of them appeared to be in her early fifties, but upon closer inspection, one would think she was only in her forties. She had originally possessed flaxen-colored hair, but she now wore a vibrant blond wig and had applied eye shadow and makeup. This concealed her fine wrinkles to some extent, but couldn't entirely hide her weariness.

"Who are they?" Lumian inquired of Charlie.

Charlie clicked his tongue and explained, "Don't you know? Our penny-pinching landlord has changed his ways. He no longer hires someone to clean just once a week. Now he's opted to have two cleaning ladies work every morning.

"Tell me, tell me, isn't this a miraculous turn of events? It's only slightly less fortunate than my own stroke of luck back then!"

Lumian, having just finished perusing Salle de Bal Brise's financial statements, immediately considered the salary of a cleaning lady.

Around 70 to 80 verl d'or per month.

However, that was for full-time work. This kind of half-day job would cost at most 45 verl d'or.

“Two cleaning ladies working half a day wouldn't exceed 100 verl d'or per month. Hiring someone for regular cleaning once a week costs 18 verl d'or each time. And Monsieur Ive promised to increase it to twice a week. In other words, it'll cost 150 verl d'or per month.

“How is this generous? It's simply meticulous budgeting!” Lumian scoffed.

He suspected that if it weren't for the fact that a cleaning lady couldn't finish the entire motel in half a day, no one would take on such a job. Monsieur Ive definitely wouldn't hire two.

“Is that so?” Charlie scratched his head.

His computational abilities couldn't keep up with Lumian's rapid deductions.

As the two cleaning ladies entered a vacant room to rid it of bedbugs, Lumian subtly gestured in their direction with his chin.

“Why is one of them wearing a wig and eye shadow?”

What kind of cleaning lady does that?

Charlie lowered his voice and said, “I asked about that. Her name is Elodie. She claims to have been a theater actress and says she's used to dollying herself up like that. And she continues to do so to this day.

“No one knows if she's telling the truth. When I worked as an attendant at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc, I heard from the kitchen staff that when aging prostitutes are scorned, their only option is to take on tasks like dishwashing and cleaning...”

Lumian recollected Elodie's appearance and surmised that she must have been quite a beauty in her youth. Whether she had been a theater actress or a woman of the streets had no bearing on her current role as a cleaning lady.

After bidding farewell to Charlie, Lumian made his way to the restaurant on the first floor for a quick meal before taking a public carriage to Avenue du Boulevard.

He intended to inform Mr. K that the mission had been successfully accomplished!

Chapter 177 Proselytizing

Before stepping onto the public carriage, Lumian made a special effort to spend six licks on purchasing a copy of the Psychic magazine, disguising himself as someone attending a gathering of mysticism enthusiasts at 19 Rue Scheer.

He worried that Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob, might secretly tail him to ascertain if something was amiss.

While he could employ some anti-tracking methods to try and shake off potential pursuers, wouldn't that raise more suspicion?

In comparison, it would be more convincing to pose as a naive country bumpkin who had recently arrived in Trier and stumbled upon the Beyonder path. Such an individual would naturally crave

knowledge about mysticism, leading to the purchase of Psychic and other magazines. Occasionally attending various gatherings of mysticism enthusiasts would solidify the facade.

In truth, this tale held some merit.

The only hitch was that Mr. K, the organizer of the mysticism enthusiast gathering, had a secret organization backing him.

If Gardner Martin's men had indeed delved into their investigation, Lumian would let them confront Mr. K and witness the clash of strengths!

As the Prankster King of Cordu, Lumian always relished witnessing a spectacle unfold.

When the time arrived, he would adjust his choices based on the outcome of the battle. In any case, his overall direction would remain unchanged. He would follow the instructions of Madam Magician and infiltrate the secret organization behind Mr. K.

Inside the carriage, Lumian flipped through Psychic.

The current issue focused on the theme of “secret deeds.”

Contrary to Lumian's initial instinctive interpretation, the term “deed” in the context of secret deeds did not refer to an actual “deed” but rather denoted “compatibility.” It represented a method of merging one's mind with a specific hidden entity, enabling the acquisition of corresponding mental experiences and a certain amount of mystical knowledge.

Psychic's editorials stressed that this act was exceedingly perilous. Unless one could verify the trustworthiness and absence of malice in the subject of the secret deed, attempting it was strongly discouraged. It would lead to dire and severe consequences, including but not limited to mental illness, possession by evil spirits, loss of rationality, sudden death, and alterations in personality.

Ah, now it makes sense... Lumian immediately grasped some of the contents of Aurore's grimoire.

Initially, he had struggled to comprehend those passages, viewing them through the lens of a contract. However, with a change in perspective, he now roughly understood their meaning.

Lumian lowered his gaze to the Psychic magazine in his hand and silently commended it, saying,

It's more useful than I anticipated. I had thought it was all concocted to deceive enthusiasts of mysticism.

Yes, although there are numerous errors in common sense that suggest it wasn't written by someone who truly ventured into the Beyonder world and conducted extensive research, their explanations of certain concepts are rather advanced. They come close to the correct answer, and some even enlighten me...

Amidst his praise, he muttered, Considering that Mr. K resides beneath the headquarters of Psychic, could there truly be Beyonders among the editorial staff and contributing authors of these mysticism magazines?

Did they intentionally write an accurate article first and then deliberately alter many concepts and common knowledge to something incorrect?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian inwardly hissed.

From this vantage point, the editors of this issue aren't instructing the correct secret deed ritual. Instead, they are cautioning those who attempt secret deeds without discretion!

No, it's not merely without discretion. It's more plausible that it was purposefully guided by someone with malicious intentions...

At that moment, Lumian revisited Psychic, no longer focusing on the specific words.

He even sensed that it was brimming with warnings written in blood-red ink: "Cease! Refrain from engaging in any further secret deed rituals!"

The mysterious world is truly fraught with peril... Lumian closed his eyes and sighed deeply, touched by emotions.

The longer he immersed himself in the field of mysticism, the more he comprehended his sister's helplessness and struggle.

He closed Psychic, a magazine two licks cheaper than the average, and directed his gaze out of the carriage window.

Upon reaching Rue Scheer in Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian executed his customary anti-tracking measures, showcasing his Hunter instincts.

He then entered Psychic's headquarters and knocked on the door of Room 103 using the distinctive pattern of three-long, two-short, and one-long knock.

As before, he was led to the basement and encountered Mr. K.

Mr. K still wore a voluminous black robe with an oversized hood, rendering his face concealed within shadows.

Seated in the crimson-backed chair, he gazed at Lumian for a few seconds before speaking in a low, raspy voice, "What brings you here this time?"

"Mr. K, I have fulfilled the mission you assigned me and have become a leader in the Savoie Mob of the market district. I now oversee Salle de Bal Brise and Auberge du Coq Doré," Lumian said with a smile.

Mr. K offered a slight nod.

"Excellent. I like your way of doing things.

"What you must do next is earn Gardner Martin's trust and secure his genuine recognition."

This time, Mr. K omitted the words "reward" or "mission." Instead, he issued a direct command, treating Lumian as if he were already his subordinate.

Earning the Boss's trust? Lumian was momentarily taken aback, followed by intense bewilderment and unease.

He recalled vividly that when Mr. K assigned the mission, he hadn't specified joining the Savoie Mob. He had used the word "any"!

Yet now, the subsequent task was to be truly acknowledged by the boss of the Savoie Mob!

If I hadn't chosen Baron Brignais and chose another mob, what kind of mission would Mr. K have assigned me today?

Or was he utterly convinced that I would join the Savoie Mob?

What makes him so certain?

Thoughts swirled in Lumian's mind, reminding him of recent events

Baron Brignais dispatched me to handle a leader from the Poison Spur Mob after I eliminated the pervert and obtained the canister of sedatives, putting it to good use...

Isn't this too much of a coincidence?

There are other similar occurrences...

Every so often, I sense someone's gaze upon me from the shadows nearby, yet I perceive nothing...

Could all of this have been orchestrated by Mr. K?

If I had not chosen the Savoie Mob, would I have been "arranged" to join the Savoie Mob following a series of incidents?

The more Lumian pondered, the more a sense of dread overcame him.

When Lumian looked at Mr. K again, the notion of treating him as a cash cow vanished from his mind.

Perhaps, apart from Madam Magician and a few others, this might be the most powerful Beyonder he had ever encountered!

Unknowingly, it compelled him to comply with the other party's desires!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian lowered his head and said, "Yes, Mr. K."

He assumed the demeanor of a subordinate.

Meanwhile, he couldn't help but think of "Red Boots" Franca.

This member of the secret organization, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, possessed both a background and strength, yet she aspired to become the mistress of a mob boss. Clearly, she harbored ulterior motives.

Is her objective also to get close to Gardner Martin? Is she involved in something significant or a crucial secret? Lumian attempted to make an educated guess.

Mr. K nodded in satisfaction.

"I'm pleased to see you know your place. Don't worry, I won't be stingy with the rewards.

"Have you not prayed in any cathedral recently?"

He changed the subject.

"I'm a wanted criminal!" Lumian recalled Madam Magician's warning and retorted angrily, "Besides, those deities won't save us at all!"

Mr. K chuckled.

“It's not that they won't, but they can't. Their power cannot envelop all believers and assist everyone during times of calamity.

“There are numerous reasons, but to put it succinctly, there is only one:

“Weakness is an inherent sin.

“Are you curious about the Lord I believe in? He embodies the truth of this world. He is supreme. His divine grace flows abundantly like the sea. He created everything and shall annihilate everything. He is power incarnate, as are we.”

Observing Lumian's silence, Mr. K didn't press further.

“You need not answer me now. Ponder carefully during this period. Reflect on who can save us and offer protection in this increasingly perilous and deranged world.

“Once you have affirmed your faith in Him, you will genuinely become one of us. It won't be long before your strength significantly improves.”

“I shall consider it deeply,” Lumian replied in a hushed tone.

Mr. K then inquired, “Is there anything else?”

Having adjusted his mindset, Lumian asked, with the intention of not missing out on anything by asking, “In the course of fulfilling the mission, if I encounter danger, may I employ your finger? How should I utilize it?”

Mr. K nodded and responded, “Just take it out.”

In other words, it could be employed.

“If I use it, how should I deal with the threat from Susanna Mattise in the future?” Lumian probed further.

Mr. K fell silent for a few seconds.

“After you employ that finger, return to me here. I shall provide you with another one.”

Indeed, your fingers are consumables... Lumian pondered for a moment and said, “I sold ‘Hammer’ Ait's Beyonder characteristic to Gardner Martin for 18,000 verl d'or. I wish to purchase a Sealed Artifact that can enhance my mystical abilities or aid me in better disguising myself. Do you have any such items here, Mr. K?”

Mr. K didn't offer an immediate response, as if he were contemplating a suitable candidate. After a while, he said to Lumian, “Come here and make your selection on Saturday night.”

Lumian beamed.

“Thank you, Mr. K.”

It felt reassuring to have the support of an organization, even if he was only an unofficial member.

After arriving at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, Lumian carefully stowed Mr. K's finger in Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré. His next destination was Salle de Bal Brise, where he intended to locate an unoccupied room. There, he would summon the messenger of Madam Magician to relay the progress of his mission. Lumian hoped to receive valuable feedback from her, particularly regarding how Mr. K had permitted these events to unfold with an uncanny degree of coincidence.

Chapter 178 The Messenger's Response

Evening, Avenue du Marché, Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian made his way to the entrance. Just as he reached the door, he was greeted by two mobsters standing guard.

“Good evening, Boss.”

Lumian, still donned in a crisp white shirt, a black vest, and rolled-up cuffs, acknowledged them with a smile and a nod.

Louis and Sarkota had been eagerly awaiting the return of their new leader. Spotting Lumian entering the dance hall, they swiftly abandoned their positions at the bar counter and forced smiles on their faces.

“Boss, why don't you let us accompany you? It's not safe to be unprotected like this!” Louis expressed his loyalty with concern.

Lumian chuckled in amusement and replied, “You two? Protecting me?”

“I worry that if anything were to happen, you both would end up beaten to a pulp. I'd have to compensate your loved ones.”

Louis smiled sheepishly.

“I know you're formidable, Boss, and you can handle ‘Hammer’ Ait and ‘Wolf’ Margot on your own. But isn't there a saying that goes, ‘Two fists can't fight four hands’? Besides, we all carry guns, and our aim isn't too shabby.”

Two fists can't fight four hands? Lumian thought to himself. Wasn't that something Emperor Roselle once said? When did it become a saying? Aurore had always suspected that many vulgarities originated from Emperor Roselle, but nobody had ever confirmed it... Lumian glanced at Louis, who appeared tough but had a submissive demeanor, and Sarkota, with his curly brown hair and full lips. He nodded slightly and responded, “When I instruct you to follow, you may do so. When I don't, keep an eye on the dance hall. If anyone dares to cause trouble, shoot them.”

“Right, where can I find a shooting range?”

“There's one in the basement of the dance hall,” Louis pointed downwards, indicating his feet. “The other leaders also come there to practice their shooting skills, but they have to bring their own ammunition.”

“Excellent.” Lumian nodded in satisfaction.

He urgently needed to improve his marksmanship, as he lacked effective long-range attacks.

Louis asked again, “Boss, the environment at Auberge du Coq Doré is dreadful. Are you planning to relocate to the dance hall? There are several rooms on the second floor for you to choose from. Or do you intend to stay in the temporary rest area previously used by Baron Brignais?”

Louis displayed his willingness, recognizing that both he and Sarkota had once been trusted aides of Baron Brignais. If they failed to earn the trust of the new leader, they might be relegated to mere bouncers at the entrance. Their status would plummet, and they would be at the mercy of the members of the Savoie Mob, with whom they had never gotten along. Not only would their income suffer, but they would also face significant bullying.

Lumian pondered for a moment before responding, “Show me the rooms.”

This location was ideal for the ritual to summon Madam Magician's messenger.

Lumian had no plans to check out of Auberge du Coq Doré anytime soon. His strategy involved selecting a room on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise and Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré as his nightly resting places after dismissing Louis and Sarkota. This increased his chances of being attacked under the cover of darkness. Occasionally, he would also consider his rented safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian sensed that the Poison Spur Mob wouldn't let him off easily. He had eliminated three leaders consecutively and had deliberately provoked them. Once the authorities let their guard down a little, the likelihood of retaliation would be high. Lumian was confident that the other side had been provoked, as his potion had been further digested. In another month or two, he might even consider advancing to Pyromaniac.

Lumian didn't worry too much about being secretly attacked by “Black Scorpion” Roger and the other leaders of the Poison Spur Mob. With Mr. K's finger, he stood a good chance of defending himself, even against Susanna Mattise, who was equivalent to a Sequence 5 Beyonder, let alone “Black Scorpion” Roger and the others who had not yet become Sowers.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian made his way through the café and entered the corridor. After scanning the area, he pointed to a room closer to his office and declared, “I'll take this one.”

The room boasted classical furniture, a four-piece set of dark red velvet, and a cushioned recliner.

“Boss, should we replace these fabric items with new ones?” Louis ingratiatingly inquired.

Sarkota, ever quiet in comparison, stood by his side.

“No need,” Lumian replied, finding an excuse. He then assigned his two bodyguards to watch over the door leading from the café to the second-floor corridor. Locking the door, he settled himself at a wide wooden table near the window to write a letter to Madam Magician.

In the letter, he emphasized that he had completed Mr. K's mission and earned his trust, even undergoing proselytization. He mentioned the opportunity to join the secret organization supporting Mr. K and inquired about the necessity of praying to Mr. K's lord, as well as the potential

consequences of being monitored by that entity. Finally, he highlighted his recent actions and expressed his unease over certain coincidences.

Once he neatly folded the letter, Lumian arranged the altar and conjured a wall of spirituality.

With the summoning ritual completed, he fixed his gaze upon the blue flame of the candle and waited in the chilling and eerie environment.

Before long, a doll-like figure, the size of an arm, materialized above the fire.

Clad in a delicate golden dress, the figure surveyed the area with unfocused, light-blue eyes. Raising its right hand, it delicately pinched its petite, pale-white nose.

“It stinks! It stinks! This place isn't as clean as the last one!”

“Isn't this place supposed to be clean?” Lumian exclaimed, scanning his surroundings in surprise. “There are no bedbugs, and it's just been cleaned.”

The messenger continued to wrinkle its nose, its voice ethereal and illusory as it spoke.

“There are old bones buried beneath the ground!

“They're foul, putrid, and repulsive!”

With those words, the blond “doll” snatched the letter and vanished instantly.

Clearly, it had no intention of staying a moment longer!

Old bones underground? Lumian repeated the messenger's words, perplexed.

He remembered that Salle de Bal Brise had been erected upon a cemetery belonging to a cathedral, and the bodies and ashes had been relocated to the catacombs.

Even after the Savoie Mob had acquired the building, there remained an eerie atmosphere. Concerned that some bones might have been left behind deep beneath the ground, they had commissioned a spherical statue crafted from white skulls and placed it at the entrance, accompanied by an engraved inscription.

The messenger's reaction hinted that there truly were ancient remains interred underground.

When the cathedral had moved the remains and ashes from the original cemetery to the catacombs, they likely hadn't intentionally left anything behind, unless they had failed to discover it or were unaware... Could it be that there is a hidden tomb beneath the original cemetery, dating back to the Fourth Epoch? Is that why the messenger reacted so strongly? Well, for now, let's set aside the matter of the old bones underground. After all, nothing untoward has occurred at Salle de Bal Brise throughout these years. It's highly unlikely that anything would go awry the moment I set foot here, right? Lumian mused, concluding the ritual and tidying up the altar.

He settled into the cushioned recliner, gently rocking back and forth, awaiting Madam Magician's response.

Time passed, and the sky darkened completely. Lumian contemplated whether he should have Louis and the others bring dinner to his room or indulge in it at the café or the bar counter.

Suddenly, a stack of papers fell from above, landing on his lap.

This time, the “doll” messenger didn't even reveal itself, clearly displaying its profound aversion to the overall “environment” of Salle de Bal Brise.

In the future, I'll summon it at Auberge du Coq Doré or that safe house... Lumian unfolded the letter and read it attentively.

“Excellent job. It seems you have gained Mr. K's admiration and initial approval.

“From now on, simply follow his instructions. When the need arises, I will inform you of the true objective in advance.

“You can pretend to believe in the entity mentioned by Mr. K. After all, you already bear traces of two entities. Adding another one won't be an issue. I'm just concerned it might get a bit crowded.

“Haha, the previous statement was a jest. The real solution is as follows:

“You can feign belief, but whenever you meet Mr. K and engage in prayer, beseech my lord for the protection of an angel. You should have learned the corresponding ritualistic magic, correct? If not, consult your sister's grimoires.

“Usually, refrain from invoking the honorific name of that individual, even if the order has been disrupted. Unless you are certain you have received the angel's protection.

“I understand that the more one tries to suppress certain memories, the more they tend to resurface. During your next therapy session, you can attempt seeking assistance from your psychiatrist. In other words, you must postpone the matter of becoming a false believer until after the upcoming treatment.

“As for coincidences, they often have multiple factors intertwined in various things.

“Firstly, the corruption sealed within your body stems from an entity known as Inevitability. Clearly, Inevitability is linked to fate. It will subtly disrupt your destiny, leading you to encounter specific individuals and events that you are ‘destined’ to come across.

“Secondly, it is highly likely that Mr. K has made arrangements to station someone in the shadows, observing you and providing the mob leaders with subtle psychological cues. This leads me to suspect that he is either a Sequence 6 Hypnotist or a Sequence 5 Dreamwalker from the Spectator path. However, based on your earlier description, he also possesses the powers of a Notary. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that he is a Shepherd. Shepherds are Sequence 5 Beyonders from the Secrets Suppliant path, and they serve the entity in whom Mr. K believes.

“Shepherds can graze upon the souls and characteristics of other Beyonders, enabling them to wield their abilities. This renders every Shepherd incredibly formidable, standing at the pinnacle of Mid-Sequence Beyonders.

“Thirdly, this stems from the law of convergence and my previous hypothesis of repulsion. Trust me, I won't be surprised that you will encounter more believers of evil gods, Hunters, and Demonesses in a short span of time.

“Stay diligent, Seven of Wands.”

Shepherd? That sounds incredibly powerful... I have already encountered another Hunter and two Demonesses... Lumian ignited Madam Magician's response by channeling his spirituality.

Chapter 179 Feast

As Lumian gazed at the smoldering remnants of the paper, memories of Mr. K's relentless pressure flooded his mind.

So a Shepherd's essence lies in Grazing. They graze upon the souls and characteristics of other Beyonders or Beyonder creatures to harness their abilities...

Thus, a seasoned Shepherd is truly unparalleled. They excel in close combat, long-range attacks, and a multitude of mystical techniques...

In fact, a Contractee is somewhat like a simplified version of a Shepherd. Each contract is limited to a single ability. When one's Sequence is low, the number of contracts is severely restricted. At most, it might reach five, but often it doesn't exceed three. If one fails to choose their abilities wisely, they may struggle to defeat an ordinary person armed with a gun. It's not comparable to a Shepherd's power, where Grazing bestows all abilities, undiminished...

Of course, at the level of the padre, signing ten or twenty contracts becomes a different experience. Furthermore, contracts often target beings from the spirit world with a wide array of peculiar abilities. Beyonders encountering them for the first time will find it challenging to adapt...

The more Lumian pondered, the more dread Mr. K instilled in him.

Suppressing his thoughts, Lumian stood up and let out an inward sigh.

No wonder Madam Magician believes Mr. K can withstand Susanna Mattise—an evil spirit...

Leaving the room, Lumian approached Louis and Sarkota with composure and uttered, “Have the kitchen prepare dinner.”

“Boss, what would you like to eat?” Louis inquired before Sarkota could speak.

Lumian couldn't recall the menu at Salle de Bal Brise's attached café. He pondered for a moment and replied, “Bring me a set meal. Join me.”

“Alright.” Louis signaled Sarkota to inform the café attendant.

Lumian settled at Baron Brignais's favored table and picked up the day's newspaper.

The Trier Gazette adorned the top, followed by The Reformer Daily, People's Voice, Action News, Intis Daily, Friends of the People, and other prominent newspapers.

Lumian couldn't resist turning his head, a hint of amusement in his voice as he asked Louis,

“Is that what Brignais typically reads?”

A mobster concerned about national affairs?

Louis glanced at Sarkota on the other side and replied with a smile, “He doesn't read such things. He only insists that we avoid offending reporters and newspapers. If possible, we should subscribe to influential newspapers. Occasionally, he'll spend money to place advertisements for Salle de Bal Brise, boasting of the presence of captivating dancers here.

“He usually reads the three newspapers and magazines at the bottom.”

Avoiding conflicts with newspapers and reporters... That makes sense. If the Trier Gazette publishes news of a significant mob presence in the market district, the Savoie Mob would be doomed the next day. Those old men still value their reputation... Lumian gained a bit more understanding.

He then retrieved the newspapers and magazines from the bottom.

Isn't this more interesting than The Reformer Daily and Action News? Lumian picked up Novel Weekly and delved into the latest serialized story.

Casually, he inquired, “Where do the funds and advertising fees for these newspapers come from?”

Louis pondered for a moment, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead, but he couldn't provide an answer. Just then, Sarkota chimed in, “It's deducted from the 100,000 verl d'or we set aside for cultivating ties with the police.”

Lumian nodded approvingly, satisfied that it wouldn't hinder his gains as the new leader of the Savoie Mob!

Before long, the café attendant arrived with their food.

Onion minced pigeon, smoked rock crab, hot bamboo chicken pie, stewed mutton brain, stewed veal slices, grilled oysters with vanilla, two salads, scarlet cheese, grilled almond sauce, a glass of red, white, and blue liqueur, and a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon.

The fragrant aromas mingled together, wafting into Lumian's nostrils and causing his mouth to water even more.

Just as expected from Trier. Even an ordinary café's set meal offers such a variety of dishes. If this were Loen, I'd be limited to choosing between pan-fried steak or stewed peas with tender mutton... Lumian, being a pure Intisian, mockingly compared Loen's cuisine based on his impressions from various newspapers, magazines, and folk jokes.

He lifted the glass of tricolor liqueur and took a sip, then pointed to the armchairs on either side of the table, saying, “Let's eat together.”

Louis bowed slightly and replied with a smile, “Boss, we'll take turns eating after you finish.”

Lumian didn't insist and savored his first feast since arriving in Trier—and it was on the house.

It had to be said that the chefs at Salle de Bal Brise were truly skilled. Lumian nodded repeatedly as he enjoyed his meal.

Among the dishes, he found the mutton brain most delightful. Skillfully infused with several spices, the fishy and gamey flavors of the brain were cleverly balanced, leaving behind a delicate texture akin to Roselle tofu, accompanied by a rich and enticing fragrance.

He finished the glass of red, white, and blue liqueur and one-third of the bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. Then, he gestured for Louis and Sarkota to take their turns.

Lumian picked up Novel Weekly and Ghost Face magazines, ready to delve into their contents.

In the pages of Ghost Face, Lumian's eyes fell upon a familiar name: DuVar.

The proprietor of the restaurant renowned for inventing DuVar's broth had amassed a fortune and relocated to Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra.

An intriguing anecdote caught Lumian's attention within the Ghost Face pages:

DuVar's infatuation with Perle, a stage actress from Loen and a Trier courtesan, had cost him a fortune. The tale recounted a banquet held at Perle's private residence, where she lay naked on an enormous silver platter, served by attendants, in the presence of over a dozen guests.

This shattered DuVar's heart. He had even attempted suicide to no avail.

Lumian couldn't decide whether to sigh at the Trieriens' tendency to exaggerate or to jest at the Loenese for not being as conservative as they seemed. It appeared that the latter adapted swiftly in Intis, or perhaps he should mock DuVar for his unblemished innocence despite being a Trierien in his forties.

At times, Lumian couldn't help but wonder if these behaviors stemmed from the influence of a Beyonders' nature or if the followers of the malevolent god couldn't rein in their impulses.

Naturally, had it not been for the shared inclinations among the Trieriens and the fact that many things posed no issues, these individuals would have been exposed long ago.

After Louis and Sarkota had finished their meal, Lumian led them down to the first floor.

The dance hall buzzed with activity in the evening. Jenna stood upon the wooden stage, her voice carrying a melodious tune accompanied by the band. Couples below embraced one another, twirling around the floor.

Lumian cast a fleeting glance at the scene before redirecting his gaze and striding toward the exit.

"Boss, where are we headed?" Louis inquired.

Lumian chuckled.

"Am I the boss or are you? Do I need to report my whereabouts to you?"

Louis's expression froze. He glanced at the silent Sarkota and suddenly felt that emulating his composure wasn't a bad idea.

"I-I'm merely concerned about our next course of action," he asserted.

As Lumian made his way out of the dance hall, amidst greetings from the bouncers, he smiled and replied, "I will inform you when there is a need for you to know."

He returned to Auberge du Coq Doré but veered away from Room 207, where he had intended to retrieve Mr. K's finger and his revolver. Instead, he ventured into the underground bar.

Before Lumian could assess the situation, Charlie's voice reached his ears, brimming with enthusiasm.

“Have you heard the news? Ciel now goes by the nickname ‘Lion’ Ciel!

“‘Little Minx’ Jenna came up with it. Have you laid eyes on her? I doubt you’ve ever seen a woman as stunning as her. She possesses an alluring figure and a face that could bewitch anyone. When she sings, everyone yearns to abandon their faith for her. And she took a liking to Ciel and invited him to dance. They were inseparable, grinding each other! Oh, the dance hall was dimly lit. You can well imagine what transpired...”

“...” Lumian suddenly felt like he had become the protagonist of a news story in Ghost Face.

Louis and Sarkota, standing behind him, felt both embarrassed and concerned for their boss.

They were embarrassed that the person at the small round table might be boasting on their boss's behalf. They were worried that if it were true, their boss would be making “Red Boots” Franca a cuckold. In that case, they would be in serious trouble. Franca not only held considerable power but was also the mistress of their big boss!

Charlie, holding a beer, caught sight of Lumian, and his smile froze.

He hopped off the small round table and approached Lumian, coughing before speaking.

“Hey, Ciel, would you mind if I shared some details about your romantic entanglement?”

Instead of answering, Lumian asked, “How did you find out?”

Charlie grinned. “Many people know; it spread from the Salle de Gristmill.”

In other words, the Poison Spur Mob is aware that I danced with Jenna twice before assassinating “Hammer” Ait? That's true. I only disguised myself back then, without even changing my hair color. I even provoked those around me. In hindsight, coupled with “Hammer” Ait's demise, they will surely recognize me... As Red Boots' mistress, Jenna may also become a target for their vengeance. There's no need to be overly concerned, though. She is protected by Red Boots. As a seasoned Beyonder and a formidable Demoness, Franca won't be careless in such matters... Lumian nodded, understanding the situation.

He smiled at Charlie and said, “Feel free to share.”

The more the news spread, the more it would attract Red Boots' attention, deterring any potential reprisal from the Poison Spur Mob.

Lumian asked Charlie, “Why didn't you go to Salle de Bal Brise?”

Charlie forced a smile and replied, “The manager, René, wants me to start officially tomorrow. He offered me 80 verl d'or per month.”

As they conversed, Lumian noticed his neighbor sitting at the bar counter.

The abject author Gabriel.

He still sported disheveled, greasy brown hair, large black-framed glasses, a faded linen shirt, and black dungarees.

Lumian bid farewell to Charlie and approached Gabriel, asking, "What's the matter?"

Gabriel, sipping on a glass of light-green absinthe, glanced at him and smiled bitterly.

"My script was rejected. Those managers didn't even bother reading it!

"I've submitted it to dozens of theaters, but no one is willing to give it a chance."

Dozens of theaters... Lumian's heart stirred as he casually inquired, "Did you send your script to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons in our market district?"

"Yes," Gabriel sighed. "Their manager turned me down too. He mentioned that they write their own scripts or commission custom ones."

Lumian took a seat and asked, "Who is their manager?"

Chapter 180 Lazy

Gabriel took a sip of absinthe and spoke, "Maipú Meyer. He's a theater manager with big ambitions. He aims to make Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons the most renowned theater in Trier. His ultimate goal is to be awarded the prestigious Intis Legion of Honor medal."

The Intis Legion of Honor medal originated during the time of Emperor Roselle when he was still a Consul. It was created to replace the nobility system of the old royal family. However, when Roselle declared himself Caesar, the medal was abolished, and titles like dukes, counts, barons, and knights were reintroduced.

Later, when the Intis Republic was established, the Legion of Honor Medal was reinstated. It was given to both military personnel and civilians who made remarkable contributions to the Republic. It wasn't limited to the military but included individuals from various industries. It was the highest honor in the current Intis Republic and being a recipient equated to being a knight from the past.

In the past, painters, authors, actors, journalists, and sculptors had been honored with the Intis Legion of Honor medal, serving as inspirations for future generations.

In the stories he crafted in his dream, he deceived the villagers of Cordu by claiming that Aurore was headed to Trier to receive the Legion of Honor medal. It wasn't entirely implausible. If Aurore could become Intis's renowned Fors Wall and the best-selling author on the Northern Continent, gaining recognition from L'Institut de Intis for her artistic achievements, she might have a genuine chance at obtaining the Legion of Honor medal.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "If a person lacks dreams, they're no different from salted fish." He found Maipú Meyer, the theater manager, to be quite ordinary.

This led him to believe that the issues with Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons extended beyond the majority of the people. There were only a few individuals closely associated with the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, Monsieur Ive, who were peculiar.

After conversing with Gabriel for a while, Lumian guided Louis and Sarkota to the second floor and asked them to wait outside Room 207.

He closed the door behind him, took off his holster from under his left armpit, and stashed away the bullet bag. Then, he put on a dark jacket.

Without delay, Lumian retrieved Mr. K's finger from beneath the pillow and slipped it into his right pocket.

As for Fallen Mercury, the dagger from Hedsey, the awakening gas, and the unidentified liquid, he always carried them with him. However, the bayonet served no immediate purpose, so he left it in a drawer of the wooden table.

Once he completed these actions, Lumian bent down and retrieved a brown suitcase from under the bed. He carefully placed Aurore's grimoires inside.

Given his altered identity and the increased hostility from the Poison Spur Mob, he felt the need to secure these grimoires in a safer and more secluded location—the rented safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

To Lumian, these items held precious clues and knowledge left behind by Aurore. They also possessed an irreplaceable sentimental value that required protection.

As for his daily studies, he would pre-copy a portion of the material and leave it at Auberge du Coq Doré or Salle de Bal Brise. Once he mastered it and ensured there were no issues, he would copy a few more pages at the safe house.

After turning down Louis's offer to assist with his luggage, Lumian made his way back to Salle de Bal Brise and entered a room near the office.

He retrieved the grimoire he had been perusing recently and laid it out on the desk. Taking hold of a dark-red fountain pen, he commenced copying its contents onto a thick stack of white paper.

As he transcribed, Lumian found the task dreadfully dull. Ideas on how to avoid the monotony began to creep into his mind.

Soon enough, an idea struck him.

Why not summon that rabbit-shaped creature from the spirit world, the one who had previously written the report for him, and have it copy his notebook?

Though that creature was dim-witted and lacking in intellect, it proved obedient. It possessed a remarkable speed for copying and could imitate the original handwriting... In that case, all I need to do is provide spirituality while I indulge in reading newspapers and magazines, waiting for my homework to be completed. No, not homework... rather, copying notes... Lumian pondered momentarily before setting his fountain pen down and preparing for the summoning ritual.

Back in Cordu, upon finishing his sister's daily assignments, Lumian often contemplated ways to slack off.

He had been teaching Reimund, Ava, and the others to comprehend words, hoping they could assist him with his homework as they improved.

Alas, the disparity in knowledge between them was too vast. It couldn't be bridged without several years of effort.

Before long, Lumian arranged the altar, consecrated the ritual silver dagger, and erected a wall of spirituality.

As the fragrance of citrus and lavender wafted through the air, he gazed at the candle flame's yellow hue and uttered in ancient Hermes:

“I!”

In the next second, Lumian switched to Hermes.

“I summon in my name:

“Spirit wandering in the void, a friendly creature that can be communicated with, weakling who can write Intisian...”

The candle flame swiftly transformed into a deep shade of green, expanding to the size of a human head.

Completing the remaining incantation, Lumian witnessed the emergence of a translucent and hazy figure from within the candle flame.

Standing at nearly 1.9 meters tall, it possessed the head of an ox atop a human body, garbed in brown fur clothing.

Not the rabbit... That's right. There must be numerous spirit world creatures that fit the description of my summoning incantation. The one who responds to the summons is entirely random... Lumian experienced a mix of disappointment and anticipation as he pointed toward the grimoire.

“Copy it for me.”

The ethereal “minotaur” nodded faintly.

“Alright.”

Without delay, it seated itself, picked up the dark-red fountain pen, and commenced copying Aurore's grimoire.

Not bad at all, much more intelligent than that silly rabbit... Lumian thought, his delight evident.

Just as he was about to settle into the recliner and peruse the newspapers and magazines, an unsettling feeling washed over him.

Isn't the “minotaur” too slow? More than ten seconds have passed, and it hasn't even copied a word!

No, in fact, it had only written two letters!

“Can you work any faster?” Lumian probed.

“This is already my fastest pace,” the “minotaur” responded truthfully.

“...” Lumian was at a loss for words.

It was even worse than the silly rabbit!

That creature, at the very least, functioned like a mystical typewriter. It could complete a full page of copying in less than a minute!

Lumian unconsciously considered ending the ritual and dismissing the “minotaur” before summoning another spirit world creature. However, knowing that the subsequent ones were likely to be equally peculiar, he abandoned the idea in weariness.

By the time the summoning ritual naturally came to an end, the “minotaur” had managed to copy only half a page.

Lumian rubbed his temples and made up his mind to do it himself.

After transcribing three pages, he heard a knock on the door.

“What's the matter?” Lumian closed his notebook, set aside his fountain pen, and walked toward the door.

It was Louis outside.

In his rugged guise, he lowered his voice and said, “Boss, ‘Giant’ Simon is here.”

What could he want? Lumian recalled that “Giant” Simon was a leader of the Savoie Mob, overseeing a number of dance halls and bars on Rue du Rossignol. He was suspected to be a Beyonder of the Warrior pathway, with a high likelihood of being a Sequence 8 Beyonder.

Louis simply shook his head.

“I don't know.”

Lumian inquired, “What did he discuss with Brignais last time? It didn't seem pleasant.”

Louis elaborated, “‘Giant’ Simon has always held a grudge against the baron because he controls Salle de Bal Brise.”

He instinctively used the term “baron.”

Observing that Lumian didn't take offense, Louis continued, “Salle de Bal Brise's profits surpass those of all his dance halls and bars combined. He even has a casino in his bar!

“The last time he approached the baron, he hoped that the baron would prevent some of the more attractive dancers from coming here and instead have them transferred to Rue du Rossignol. The baron replied, ‘Red Boots is in charge of assigning the dancers. I have no objections if you discuss it with her.’

“The prices on Rue du Rossignol are very low. Beautiful dancers are reluctant to work there.”

Lumian recollected Charlie mentioning that one could find inexpensive pussies on Rue du Rossignol for as little as 52 coppet, which amounted to just half a verl d'or. On the other hand, at Salle de Bal Brise, if the dancers encountered generous patrons, they could charge up to 10 verl d'or. Typically, they fetched anywhere between 3 to 5 verl d'or.

This was despite the relatively low income in the market district. If it were Rue de la Muraille in the Red Princess district, an above-average-looking woman would cost dozens of verl d'or.

Is “Giant” Simon envious of my control over Salle de Bal Brise? Lumian nodded subtly, his brows furrowing in puzzlement, and he asked, “There's something I find rather perplexing. Why are Salle de Bal Brise's profits so substantial?”

Louis grinned.

“Most of our alcohol comes from ‘Rat’ Christo. It's tax-free and incredibly cheap.

“Moreover, we don't have to pay any rent.”

“Rat” Christo who is in charge of the smuggling business? Lumian grasped the general reasoning behind it.

He exited the room, strolled along the corridor, and entered the café.

“Giant” Simon, still clad in a snug black formal suit, had his light-yellow hair tightly plastered to his scalp.

He set his wide-brimmed round hat on the table and positioned himself by the window, puffing on a cigarette.

The mobsters trailing behind him dispersed, engaging in an intense standoff with Sarkota and the others at Salle de Bal Brise from a distance.

Spotting Lumian approaching, Simon crushed the cigarette in his hand and put on a feigned wide smile.

“Well, well, Ciel, you've already gained the Boss's approval and managed to get to run Salle de Bal Brise. Why didn't you treat us brothers to a drink?”

As Simon spoke, he strode toward Lumian.

At over 1.9 meters in height, Lumian, who was already standing at 1.8 meters, appeared rather short.

Lumian gazed up at Simon's prominent nose and pockmarked face, returning the smile.

“I have some sort of social phobia, so I couldn't bring myself to invite you guys.

“Hey, you're quite tall. Just as one would expect from a ‘Giant.’ You're even taller than ‘Hammer’ Ait.”

His words conveyed a message of maintaining their respective territories. If you don't provoke me, I won't provoke you. Otherwise, I'm capable of killing you, just like the Sequence 8 Warrior, ‘Hammer’ Ait.

“Giant” Simon didn't comprehend the meaning behind the first sentence, but he discerned the provocation in the latter.

His face darkened as a result, simultaneously dispelling his disdain for “Lion” Ciel.

This wasn't merely a brawny man. Smiles and pleasantries wouldn't get him far!

Simon gestured toward the table where Baron Brignais often sat.

“I need to discuss something with you.”