

## Inevitability 301

Chapter 301 Devil

Criminal pathway... Lumian began to recall the contents of Aurore's grimoires.

Sequence 9 Criminal possessed a formidable physique, sharp senses, and a range of criminal skills. They were adept at wielding various weapons and could even kill their targets using something as mundane as a spoon.

Sequence 8 Coldblooded were heartless and inhuman. Their bodies were further strengthened, and they gained mastery over spell-like abilities with a leaning towards the eviler domains. Different Coldblooded excelled in different aspects, making them challenging opponents to deal with with no one-size-fits-all solution.

...

Sequence 7 Serial Killer was well-versed in devilish knowledge and rituals. They could summon projections of devils from the Abyss and had a sick fascination with creating serial murders.

Turning to Madam Magician with a thoughtful expression, Lumian inquired, "What are the names of Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 on the Criminal pathway?"

"Sequence 6 is called Devil, and Sequence 5 is Desire Apostle," Madam Magician readily shared her knowledge.

From worshiping the devil to becoming one—a fitting name for the Devil pathway. And Desire Apostle sounds like a Beyonder who would follow the Mother Tree of Desire. It's a compatible match. They might as well rename it to Mother Tree of Desire Apostle... Lumian couldn't help but criticize as he analyzed the information.

Madam Magician continued, "The first major qualitative transformation of the Criminal pathway is at Sequence 6 Devil. After the corresponding Beyonder temporarily transforms into a devil, not only will their strength, speed, and defense improve, but they become immune to most poisons and acquire a certain resistance to curses and flames.

"More importantly, they possess Malicious Perception. If someone can cause fatal damage to them in a short period of time and begin to take steps to make it a reality, and both parties are within the range of their abilities, the Devil Beyonder can sense the source of danger and the perpetrator. This allows them to take targeted revenge in a counterstrike."

So powerful... Lumian couldn't help but frown.

If the Rose School of Thought's subsequent operations had members of the Devil families involved, the situation would become exponentially more dangerous.

Of course, the Prisoner pathway's Zombie and Wraiths were also terrifying.

Most importantly, at a certain Sequence, Beyonders of these two pathways boasted formidable defenses against flames.

Dammit, Pyromaniacs would be in for a rough time! Lumian made a self-deprecating comment, infected by Franca's and Jenna's vulgarities.

After pondering for a moment, Lumian inquired, "How short can the period of time be for the Malicious Perception to be effective?"

Madam Magician smiled and replied, "The Devil pathway is highly individualistic. Devils from various races each possess their distinct abilities. Even among devils originating from the same race, differences arise due to their individual nature. The reason behind this lies in the requirement of ostentatious malice, which varies from person to creature.

"Unique wills, distinct hearts, and a penchant for desires all amalgamate to form the diverse nature of devils.

"Now, to your query. Some Devils can sense malice merely minutes before its occurrence, whereas others can foretell it hours or even more in advance. As they progress in Sequence, this ability only grows stronger.

"The range of this ability's influence can span a few kilometers, an entire market district, or perhaps even encompass the whole of Trier.

"Furthermore, Devils wield an array of spells involving flames, poison, and filth." The more Lumian listened, the more serious he grew. Devils were truly powerful—just like Zombies countering Pyromaniacs, who were experts in fire spells and close combat.

After briefly explaining the Desire Apostle's abilities, Madam Magician comforted him with a smile,

"Don't worry too much. Even if the Rose School of Thought takes action in the future, their target will most likely be Gardner Martin. You'll just be along for the ride. The Iron and Blood Cross Order, being a secret organization, has enough strength to resist the Rose School of Thought even if the Devil families send someone to participate.

"If the Bliss Society and the Rose School of Thought share intelligence, you may become their primary target, but they won't launch a fatal attack on you paradoxically. They fear releasing an Inevitability angel like Termiboros. As long as you pay more attention to abnormalities and suspected conspiracies around you, you'll have enough time and opportunity to seek help."

Upon hearing this, Lumian retorted, "If the Rose School of Thought sends an angel to capture me, how will I have time to seek help?"

Madam Magician chuckled.

"Do you think Trier is a public washroom where an angel can descend and snatch someone away easily?"

“If it weren't for the alternate space of the Tree of Shadow with the Paramita World enveloping it, that brainless Abomination wouldn't have been able to descend its power.

“So, remember to avoid such places and live under the sun in Trier.”

Lumian heaved a sigh of relief and asked in confusion, “Abomination?”

Could it be the power summoned by Susanna Mattise?

Madam Magician's expression turned odd.

“Yes, Abomination—the child of the Chained God whom the Mother Tree of Desire worshipers and the Rose School of Thought originally worshiped. He's a Sequence 1 angel and the current leader of the Rose School of Thought.

“I won't tell you His real name. This guy is covered in curses. If you say His real name often, you might become a frog that needs a prince's kiss to recover. Or worse.”

“Why a prince?” Lumian had read the Intis Fairy Tales Collection published two years ago and remembered that the protagonist of the story was a princess.

“Why else would it be called a curse?” Madam Magician wore a matter-of-fact expression.

Lumian was speechless. He asked, “The spawn of the Mother Tree of Desire are angels, already roaming our world. And to descend, the child of the Great Mother requires a ritual. Is one more special than the other?”

“They're equally special,” said Madam Magician, her expression taking an odd turn once more. “The crux of the matter is that it wasn't the Mother Tree of Desire who gave birth to the Abomination, but a high-ranking existence in our world known as the Chained God.”

Lumian's heart filled with trauma as he immediately thought of Louis Lund, Administrator Béost, and his valets.

“Can the Mother Tree of Desire impregnate creatures of all races and genders through the barrier?” Lumian asked with a hint of fear in his voice.

Madam Magician shook her head.

“She doesn't have authority in that regard. That belongs to the Great Mother.

“However, if you're enticed by Her and end up interacting with the power She has descended or the aura that seeped into our world, She has plenty of ways to impregnate you. Furthermore, the Chained God pathway—the Prisoner pathway—is rather special and has a close connection to the Mother Tree of Desire.

“If it weren't for Mr. Fool's protection, the temperance faction members would have more or less been influenced by Her in the past year or two.”

Lumian nodded, then brought up the issue of the indulgence faction and the temperance faction.

“I believe the temperance faction's philosophy is correct, but why can the indulgence faction still grow and possess such strength? Is it because there's no fear of losing control when they are already crazy?”

Madam Magician chuckled and responded, “The temperance faction's philosophy is correct, but it doesn't mean that the indulgence faction's viewpoint is necessarily erroneous.

“You have to remember that acting based on the potion's name is like tarot cards. There's a difference between the upright and reversed position. And even if we act in the upright manner, the acting principles summarized by different people will vary according to their unique minds and experiences. After all, we're just acting. Our goal is to deceive the mental imprint left behind by that entity and digest the potion bit by bit. It would be troublesome if we were to completely align with Him.”

Lumian nodded in understanding.

“So, the phrase ‘remember that you're only acting’ not only prevents us from losing ourselves to avoid mental problems but also helps avoid such problems altogether?”

“That's right,” Madam Magician affirmed.

Lumian then steered the conversation back to matters pertaining to the Mother Tree of Desire.

“Mr. Poet mentioned that there are multiple organizations that worship the Mother Tree of Desire?”

“Poet...” Madam Magician's lips curled up slightly. “They're all relatively small organizations that haven't formed a large cult. They're far inferior to the Rose School of Thought and the few Devil families, but they're relatively hidden. Currently, we are aware of three. One is the Bliss Society, the other is the Naturism Sect, and the third is the Tree Worship Sect.”

After pondering the matter for a while, Lumian finally brought up the idea of crafting a mystical item using the Shadow Branch.

“Madam, once I receive the reward from Mr. K, I'd like your help in finding a saint-level Artisan to craft the item. Do you happen to know the price?” Lumian inquired.

Madam Magician grinned and replied, “I haven't rewarded you yet for successfully joining the Iron and Blood Cross Order. How about using that reward to cover the cost?”

“That sounds perfect,” Lumian happily agreed.

Receiving three rewards for a mission was truly a remarkable thing.

Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and said, "A friend's relative knows a demigod-level Artisan. I'll check with them first. If it doesn't work out, I'll find another option."

She then smiled and asked, "With the gap between the Lucky One and the potential reward from Mr. K, are you sure you want to use one of them to create a mystical item?"

Lumian responded with certainty, "I won't have any regrets."

His approach had always been to utilize available resources as swiftly as possible.

It had to be known that the padre was already a Sequence 5 bestowed when he left Cordu. He might have even taken a potion to boost his abilities. Dealing with him on one's own was akin to embracing death for Lumian.

He needed to make use of every available resource to enhance his skills quickly and gather more allies to increase his chances of success!

During his early days as a wanderer, Lumian once stumbled upon a wild apple tree laden with fruit. He intended to wait for the apples to grow larger and less sour before figuring out how to pluck them. However, to his surprise a few days later, someone else had managed to harvest all the small and sour apples.

This incident left a profound mark on Lumian, significantly influencing his approach to handling things.

## Chapter 302 Mummy Ashes

Madam Magician didn't say more and asked again, "Do you want to return to Salle de Bal Brise now, or stay here until noon?"

Lumian had never left Intis, let alone come to the Southern Continent. Since he had nothing planned, he nodded and replied, "I'd like to explore around a bit."

Madam Magician gave a slight nod and vanished before him.

...

Almost instantly, a bone-chilling wind swept through the crowd and struck Lumian.

Having come from Trier in the summer, he couldn't help but shiver in the harsh highlander winter.

Accompanied by the cold breeze, the distant clamor of the market, a few hundred meters away, filled Lumian's ears, making him feel truly immersed in this world.

Recalling how Madam Magician's arrival and disappearance had gone unnoticed by the surrounding people, Lumian quickly made a guess.

Did she create a wall of spirituality or pull me into a separate alternate space?

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he noticed that the passersby looked at him with wariness and puzzlement. He was only wearing a thin shirt, a black vest, and thin pants, which were hardly suitable for the harsh winter.

"What are you staring at? Haven't you seen someone acting cool?" Lumian muttered. Relying on Alms Monk's endurance, he nonchalantly ventured into the market.

The smell of fresh livestock dung, the sweet aroma of corn, and the tantalizing scent of roasted meat with spices filled his nostrils.

Lumian surveyed the area and spotted numerous stalls selling various food items made primarily from corn. There were boiled whole corn, roasted corn with red sauce, corn chunks served in thick soup, roasted corn wrapped in beef and mutton, onions, and potatoes, corn ground into a gooey paste and stuffed into various meat chunks, and corn spread into rough flatbread sprinkled with ingredients...

After a moment of consideration, Lumian made his way through the “cleared” path among the marketers and arrived at a stall.

The stall owner was a man in his thirties with dark and flushed skin, gaunt face, high cheekbones, and dark brown eyes. He had long greasy black hair and wore a black felt hat along with a dark red robe made of wool and other materials.

Lumian pointed at the bubbling yellow corn paste in the iron-colored pot and asked in Intisian, “How much?”

He had noticed that some folks here understood Intisian. The transactions were done using various metal currencies, including verl d'or.

The stall owner seemed scared, and he replied in non-fluent Intisian with a hint of flattery, “5 coppet for 1 cup.”

A lick, pretty cheap... Lumian glanced at the corn paste with mutton chunks and pulled out a brass coin with a Hornacis mountain range pattern on the front.

The vendor breathed with relief and quickly produced a paper cup that didn't quite match the market's style and technology. He filled it up generously, even adding a few extra meat chunks.

As Lumian received the cup, warmth spread through his body.

It was a wonderful experience to have something warm while enduring the biting wind.

The even better experience was the warm corn paste flowing from his mouth into his esophagus and into his stomach, spreading warmth to every nook and cranny of his body.

The corn paste, with its light sweetness and a hint of spiciness and pungency, perfectly complemented the beef and mutton cubes, neutralizing their gamey smell. It was peculiar and appetizing, a treat for his taste buds.

Ignoring the cautious glances from the women and the fear and loathing from the man driving the cows and sheep, Lumian sipped his corn paste and made his way to the end of the market.

Soon, he entered the City of White, Rapus. He spotted the golden Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and the God of Steam and Machinery cathedral adorned with various industrial components. The white buildings, shops selling leather and fabrics, the Highland Import and Export Corporation, and the Rapus Mining Federation signs were all visible. Carriages pulled by long-haired cows and medium-sized horses filled the streets, accompanied by locals in robes and a few foreigners in formal attire.

Lumian picked a shop called Highland Mystic Potion and entered like a tourist.

The owner, an Intisian in his forties, with typical black hair and blue eyes, wore a white shirt with floral patterns, thick cashmere clothes, and a dark blue coat with golden trim.

Upon seeing Lumian, he greeted him warmly, "Good morning, dear compatriot."

The man checked out Lumian's attire and asked with concern, "Did you encounter a bandit?"

"I just arrived in Rapus. There was an accident on the way," Lumian replied, smiling with a Trier accent.

The proprietor of the mystic potion nodded in understanding.

"The Southern Continent isn't all it's cracked up to be, but it's a paradise for adventurers. I arrived in West Balam fifteen years ago in search of opportunities. Life only turned for the better when I found true opportunities in the City of White. By steam!"

With a sigh, he drew a triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest.

"By steam!" Lumian responded with the same etiquette.

The owner's smile grew warmer.

"Brother, would you like some mummy powder? Real mummy powder!"

Lumian looked around the small shop and smiled.

"Why don't you display the mummy in the window to prove its authenticity?"

The boss smiled sheepishly and said, "That would upset the barbarians.

"Some buy mummy powder, but most can't accept mummies as commodities."

Lumian deliberately said, "When I left Trier, there was a shortage of mummy powder. The price skyrocketed. Ever thought of transporting mummies back to Trier for sale?"

"Maritime trade is too risky, and the import-export companies give terrible prices, not to mention the taxes they charge. Those damned hyenas!" The owner glanced at Lumian, testing the waters, "If you're willing to take the risks, we can cooperate."

"How many mummies can you provide?" Lumian feigned skepticism.

The boss smiled.

"That depends on how many you want. I have the right connections."

I can have as many as I want? Have you unearthed the grave of a nobleman from the Highlands Kingdom? Or will you find a corpse or even a living person to make one on the spot? Lumian engaged in a conversation with the owner of the Highland Mystic Potion and left the shop, pretending he needed time to consider the offer.

After wandering for some time, Lumian came across a magnificent three-story white building by the roadside, bustling with locals swarming in.

Curiosity got the better of him, and he followed the crowd inside, only to find Intis soldiers, clad in their distinctive black triangular hats and blue coats with gold threads, guarding the entrance in their white pants and black leather boots.

Rapus, Lumian thought to himself, is truly an Intis colonial city. His gaze settled on the golden words above the main entrance, which read: “Rapus Specialized Court.”

Taking a seat in an empty corner of the courtroom, Lumian tuned in to the trial that was underway.

Two Intis soldiers stood accused of a heinous crime—intercepting a newlywed couple in the suburbs, murdering the husband, and subjecting the wife to unspeakable horrors.

The latter was fortunate enough to survive. With numerous witnesses and ample evidence, the entire case appeared quite clear-cut.

After much deliberation, the judge, who was now holding the third hearing, finally pronounced them guilty, decreeing their immediate expulsion from the highlands. Upon their return to Intis, they would face further punishment in a military court.

The verdict didn't sit well with the local crowd, and they expressed their dissatisfaction loudly. However, the judge remained resolute, ordering bailiffs and soldiers to remove the dissenters from the court.

Lumian observed the faces of the agitated and angered locals as they were forced to leave, and only when they had gone did he decide to leave the courtroom as well.

As he strolled past the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral's square, he noticed a group of clergymen in white robes adorned with golden threads.

They were walking towards the cathedral, keeping a safe distance from the crowd, and speaking in hushed tones.

Lumian, relying on his Hunter's ears, strained to catch their words from afar.

Though the distance made it difficult, he managed to make out two phrases: “Evernight's power... has invaded this place...”

What could that mean? Is the Evernight Goddess Church of the Loen Kingdom extending its reach into the Star Highlands? Lumian pondered for a moment before continuing on his way.

...

At 12:30 p.m. Trier time, Madam Magician escorted Lumian back to Salle de Bal Brise, and he reappeared in his bedroom.

He sat down at his wooden table and began organizing Mr. Poet's interpretation of the dream's symbolic elements.

In the midst of his work, Lumian heard familiar footsteps approaching and an impolite knock on the door.

Putting down the fountain pen, Lumian stood up and glanced at the entrance.

“Come in.”

It was Franca, dressed in her usual attire of blouse, beige breeches, and red boots. However, she now wore a light-colored pleated dress around her waist.

“Very strange,” Lumian remarked honestly.

Franca sighed, a mix of joy and melancholy on her face.

“I'm not used to wearing dresses yet. This will have to do for now.

“This is to welcome Pleasure.”

“Pleasure?” Lumian was puzzled by the term she mentioned.

Franca closed the door behind her and explained with a complex expression,

“Since you've joined the Iron and Blood Cross Order, my initial mission is considered accomplished. Now, I'll see if I can join and assist with your operation.

“And since the mission is complete, there should be a reward. The next Sequence for a Witch is Demoness of Pleasure.

“Yes, I already have all the main ingredients and most of the supplementary ones, except for real mummy ashes. I came to ask if you could keep an eye out during your mysticism gatherings. Damn it, those mummy ashes sold in shops are all fake!”

Chapter 303 Sparks of “Fire”

Mummy ashes... Lumian's mind immediately went to the Highland Mystic Potion shop in Rapus.

The mummies had their origins in the old Highlands Kingdom, and they had a special ancient Highlander term for it. Emperor Roselle translated it into “mummy.”

In simpler terms, the most genuine and ancient mummies could be found in Star Highlands, the largest source of mummy ashes.

...

Franca grew more and more agitated as she spoke.

“Why do you think men in Trier are so keen on things that enhance their abilities in that area? They even dare to consume mummy ashes! This means that those who genuinely need them can't afford the real deal!”

“Many women in Trier are interested as well, hoping their husbands and lovers can perform better in bed.” Lumian had read about it and asked Franca curiously, “Does it really work?”

Franca scoffed.

“I can't see any other effects besides getting sick from using powder made from a specially prepared corpse. Well, its use in mysticism is a different matter.

“Think about it. Trier is now flooded with fake mummy ashes. People are gobbling them up without knowing if they're authentic!”

“There are many herbs with similar effects, but once they are labeled as mummy ashes, the price skyrockets. Who wouldn't take advantage of that?”

“Don't overestimate the merchants' conscience. I've heard complaints at many mysticism gatherings about people finding dead rats, grinding them into powder, mixing it with herbs, and selling it as mummy ashes.”

“When I, um, before I had superpowers and was still struggling, I saw the café owner making fake coffee from chicory. Later, he couldn't even afford that. He gathered coffee dregs, animal bile, and even brick dust and soot as a substitute. Believe me, if you visit the kitchens of certain restaurants and cafés, you'd want to hang the boss from the gallows. Those escargot shells are reused, picked up from the trash, filled with ingredients, and served to new customers”

Franca continued her rant, expressing her frustration with counterfeit and inferior products hindering her Beyonder career.

After she finished speaking, Lumian asked with certainty, “Have you finished digesting your Witch potion?”

Franca's emotions returned to normal as she replied smugly, “That was a long time ago. Have you seen me act as a Witch during this period of time?”

Lumian changed the subject thoughtfully.

“You seem to despise the Rose School of Thought for their acts of terror in the Northern Continent. You even mock them for hindering the colonization resistance by the Southern Continent natives. I don't quite understand your logic. Shouldn't they resist and take revenge when bullied?”

Franca walked to the window of Lumian's bedroom and gazed at the dock and depot concealed by buildings. Her gaze was unfocused as she said, “They should—if they wish to seek the adrenaline from exacting vengeance, for a moment of exhilaration. But if you want to lead the Southern Continent to expel the colonists, such actions will only have the opposite effect. A philosopher back home once said that no king should send troops out in anger. Resisting colonization is a serious and challenging matter; it's something that shouldn't become a wastebasket for venting one's emotions.”

Seeing Lumian's confusion, Franca pointed out the window.

“There are many workers and laborers there. They work hard every day and sleep in bedbug-infested rooms. Are they colonists? Did they benefit from the colonies? True, their jobs may be a result of colonial trade, but will they lose their jobs without the colonies and normal trade? I don't think so. The most likely possibility is that they will still have a job that barely provides sustenance; it's the bosses who lose excessive profits.”

“They have their own demands and a desire to change the current society. They often join Trier's citizens in various marches and protests, expressing deep dissatisfaction with the government.

“There are many similar people in Trier. Some of them have various reasons and even sympathize with the Southern Continent colonies.

“A philosopher king back home once said that we must distinguish between our friends and foes when carrying out deeds. The Rose School of Thought's various terrorist acts will only pit those who sympathize with the colonists and those who are also resisting the government against them. It makes them the object of hatred that will be exploited by the rulers to bridge any internal conflicts. It will harm the people of the Southern Continent's resistance against colonization.

“The philosopher king even prohibited his intelligence officers from carrying out assassinations or seeking revenge, let alone causing terrorist incidents.”

Franca snapped out of her daze and spoke with enthusiasm, her eyes sparkling, “As long as we can gather more allies, isolate our enemies, and ignite that tiny spark, it can set a whole wilderness ablaze!”

Who is friend and foe... Finding allies and isolating the enemy... Even a tiny spark can set a whole wilderness ablaze... The words left a profound impact on Lumian. He pondered Franca's words repeatedly, especially her last sentence. It unveiled a new understanding of Pyromaniac, bringing him closer to unveiling his first acting principle.

After a few moments, Lumian nodded solemnly.

“I agree with you now. The Rose School of Thought's acts of terror are extremely foolish, mere decisions made after their minds are filled with desire. Uh, as believers of the Mother Tree of Desire, it's quite expected.”

Franca pursed her lips.

“If the Rose School of Thought focused on assassinating colonial generals, members of parliament, and high-ranking government officials, as well as destroying battleships and arsenals, I wouldn't mock them. But their blood sacrifices, indiscriminately killing people, are the actions of lunatics. I don't want to become a sacrifice to these madmen one day.”

Lumian remarked, “It's a classic case of turning sympathizers against each other.”

Franca disdainfully added, “Not only do these lunatics carry out blood sacrifices in the Northern Continent, but they also do it in the Southern Continent, turning villages into uninhabited lands. The Southern Continent has the Rose School of Thought as another insurmountable obstacle besides the colonists.”

Lumian nodded gently and said, “That lady took me to the Star Highlands and during my tour of Star Highlands, I encountered a mummy merchant. Should I request permission to visit again and obtain some real mummy ashes for you?”

That lady... Franca realized something and decided not to press further. After some thought, she said, “No need for that now. Just because Trier has plenty of counterfeit goods doesn't mean there's nothing authentic. Let's try to find the authentic ones first. If not, we'll go to the Southern Continent.”

Lumian honestly shared his intentions, “I hope you can advance to Sequence 6 within a week and become a Demoness of Pleasure.”

“Huh?” Franca was confused.

Who's the one making the advancement?

Lumian didn't hide anything, responding directly, “It has been prophesied that Guillaume Bénét will appear in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge next week. I want to find him and capture him, and I need the help of more friends. The Boss has already agreed to help me find him. The stronger you are, the higher our chances of capturing Guillaume Bénét.”

Amused, Franca teased, “You're learning on the spot, kid. You really aren't holding back anymore. You made a request without getting my agreement to help.”

Lumian smiled, replying, “Isn't that what I'm doing now?”

Franca pondered for a moment before saying, “Wait a few more days. If we still can't find real mummy's ashes, we'll go to the Southern Continent to search for them. Remember, try not to trouble the Major Arcana card holder if possible.”

“Right then,” Lumian said, sharing a similar view, but he never missed a chance to fleece. Otherwise, it would be best to seek Madam Magician's help in dealing with Guillaume Bénét.

A subordinate who couldn't handle problems on their own, bothering their superior all the time, would eventually be left behind!

Furthermore, the Tarot Club followed a rule of equivalent exchange. What price would one have to pay to enlist the help of a demigod-level Major Arcana card holder?

After chatting for a while, Franca, who was about to leave, glanced at the window and suddenly said, “Although Gardner Martin already knows the situation and has made preparations, you can't be careless. You can't place all your hopes on him. The Rose School of Thought is an ancient secret organization. It must possess various abilities.”

Why are you bringing this up all of a sudden? Lumian was taken aback for a moment before responding with tacit understanding, “The Boss is at least a Conspirer. He has probably set countless traps in secret, awaiting the arrival of the Rose School of Thought.”

On this topic, the two of them continued their conversation as they left the bedroom and entered the corridor.

Franca lowered her voice and said, "I sensed something amiss with the glass in your window. I suspect a Wraith."

The Rose School of Thought's Wraith? Franca discovered something wrong with her Witch's grasp of mirrors? Lumian's nerves tensed as he nodded slightly, acting as though they were discussing an ordinary topic.

He saw Franca stroll into the café and depart Salle de Bal Brise before stepping out of the corridor. Like always, he settled into his regular seat and savored his aromatic coffee.

An hour went by, and Lumian started to feel a bit more at ease. He thought the Wraith had probably left, so he shifted his focus to Gardner Martin and the potential traps.

The following days were filled with paranoia for Lumian. He sensed eyes on him from the glass window in his room and the bathroom mirror, but nothing alarming occurred.

Finally, the day of the reward promised by Mr. K arrived.

As Lumian descended the stairs of Auberge du Coq Doré, he encountered an unfamiliar woman.

Dressed in a lake-blue dress, her brown hair flowed naturally, and her brown eyes had a uniquely ethereal quality. Her looks were above average, her cheeks plump, and her demeanor stood out from the ordinary.

As Lumian passed by the front desk, he casually asked Madame Fels, "Is that young lady a new tenant?"

The plump Madame Fels smiled ingratiatingly. "No, she's Miss Safari, staying in Room 309. She went to a small seaside town to be a human model for a painter. She only returned today.

"How enviable. Her job lets her take a vacation by the sea."

That human model? Lumian nodded and left Auberge du Coq Doré, catching a public carriage to Avenue du Boulevard.

## Chapter 304 Decency

Avenue du Boulevard, 19 Rue Scheer, basement.

Mr. K's face remained hidden under the massive hood, but Lumian could feel the admiration and recognition in his gaze.

Standing behind a red armchair, Mr. K pointed to a narrow wooden table by the wall.

...

"Make a choice. These are Grade 2 Sealed Artifacts, as per the standards of various Churches. They have distinct characteristics but come with dangerous negative effects. Nonetheless, there are ways to resolve those issues and utilize them to some extent."

Following the gesture of Mr. K's raised right hand, Lumian spotted three containers on the narrow wooden table.

One was an exquisite wooden box adorned with rubies, emeralds, agates, and other precious items. Another was a rubber injector, and the last one was a wide-mouthed bottle filled with a dreamy green liquid with a golden object at the bottom.

Mr. K approached the table, picked up the wooden box with gems, and opened it.

Inside, there lay a thin and soft leather mask. As Mr. K lifted it to display, an exaggerated face outlined in red, yellow, and white oil paint emerged.

For some reason, Lumian's mood took a plunge at the sight of the face, and his heart filled with sorrow.

"It's called the Clown Mask," Mr. K introduced in a low, raspy voice. "Wearing it enables you to create Paper Figurine Substitutes. You can ignite combustible objects within a 50-meter radius and leap between flames, allowing you to transfer wounds across your body and turn a fatal injury into a minor one. However, each wound can only be transferred once.

"It will also meld with your face, altering your appearance. This aspect is beyond your control, but it grants you strong expression control and sharp premonition for a short duration.

"To store it safely, you'll need a high-value container. Otherwise, it will continuously bring frustration, pain, and sorrow to those around it, gradually driving them insane until they break down. For Beyonders, this often means losing control.

"That's why you can't wear it for more than ten minutes at a time. Additionally, you have to 'watch' a comedic performance once a week; otherwise, it will attempt to replace you when you wear it, truly becoming your 'face.'"

Wound transference... This Sealed Artifact belongs to the Seer pathway. It corresponds to the Sequence of Bureau 8's Miss Leah or higher, Lumian quickly deduced based on his experience.

He felt that the Clown Mask suited him well. With Pyromaniac and Flaming Jump, he could significantly increase his strength.

He was in need of changing his appearance, but the limitation of wearing it for only ten minutes made it similar to the Mystery Prying Glasses, albeit more convenient.

Moreover, Paper Figurine Substitutes and wound transference could effectively boost his survivability, but when it came to dealing with Zombies, Wraiths, Devils, or Desire Apostles, these abilities lacked specificity.

Emotional influences were currently a taboo for Lumian. While his psychological issues had been somewhat healed, the flames of pain couldn't be fully extinguished. They still smoldered deep in his heart. If this emotional breakdown erupted, Termiboros would undoubtedly be grinning from end to end.

As Lumian pondered, Mr. K put the Clown Mask back into its exquisite wooden box and picked up an injector made of rubber hoses, a glass syringe, and a thin needle.

At that moment, a tube of bright red liquid quietly filled the syringe, as if it had just been extracted from a person's body.

Mr. K gently shook the injector and said, "It's called Lifeblood. Once injected into your body, it allows you to control your flesh and blood completely for a short period. You won't need to maintain your human form deliberately, and your vital points will be safe. Moreover, you can envelop a target, corrode their body, and kill them from the inside.

"Simultaneously, you can transform into your own shadow and merge with the surrounding shadows. That way, you can secretly trail the enemy and avoid detection.

"With each injection, you'll become closer to our Lord, closer to the most ancient appearance of humanity's original form. Others and creatures won't endure it well. Their bodies will collapse gradually with each injection, and they won't be able to return to their original state. Their minds will be cloaked by shadows, making them crave flesh and blood, turning them into irrational monsters. However, we need not worry. As long as we devoutly believe in our Lord and remember to pray to Him always, there won't be many issues with our bodies and minds.

"I've injected myself several times before. Am I not normal now?"

Lumian didn't fully buy into it. I don't think you're normal... The flesh corrosion ability seems useful against Zombies...

Furthermore, he wasn't devout when it came to the True Creator. He usually used psychological cues to seal the memories of His honorific name and didn't pray at all.

"If you carry Lifeblood without injecting yourself, it won't affect you other than making you crave flesh and blood," Mr. K explained. He then picked up a wide-mouthed bottle filled with green liquid

filled with an alcoholic fragrance and retrieved a golden brooch carved into a Scotch Broom from it with his white palm that appeared sickly.

"This one's called Decency.

"Once you wear it, you can acutely detect a target's weaknesses. By symbolically giving them items, you can complete a Bribe, significantly weakening their attack, defense, or control over you for a certain period.

"In addition, you can Distort the target's words, actions, and intentions. You can also Distort certain actions of yourself or others to create an environment that's beneficial to you."

Using Bribe to weaken the target's attack, defense, or control... This ability is very versatile. It can be used against Zombies, Devils, or other Beyonders... If I use Distortion well, I can come up with all kinds of tricks... Lumian's spirits lifted, believing this was what he wanted.

The next step was to see if the negative effects could be endured.

Mr. K continued, "It must be kept in liquor that exceeds 45 proof. Otherwise, it might result in arrest from official Beyonders or other factions at irregular intervals.

"You can't wear it for more than fifteen minutes. In the following hour, you'll become repulsive and disdainful. It's best not to go out. Wait patiently until the negative effects fade."

As a Hunter, how can I not be repulsed and despised? And it's normal for regulars at Ol' Tavern to carry two or three flasks of liquor with them... Sometimes, I can even use it to attract nearby factions to capture this characteristic for "fishing." It's a perfect part of certain traps... Lumian quickly made up his mind and said firmly, "I want Decency."

Now, the question was whether this Sealed Artifact could be matched with the Shadow Branch to create a mystical item with both characteristics.

Mr. K respected Lumian's decision and didn't offer any persuasion.

He tossed the Decency brooch back into the wide-mouthed bottle of liquor, capped it, and handed it to Lumian.

Lumian swiftly caught it and mumbled, What if I'm not skilled enough to catch it and shatter the bottle? We'll exchange looks and then flee before the official Beyonders come after us?

Lumian gripped the bottle of liquor suspected to be absinthe and deliberately said, "I have something to report."

He briefly recounted the Werewolf incident and concluded, "The Rose School of Thought suffered repeated setbacks, yet they remain arrogant. I heard they also believe in the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire."

Mr. K's gaze turned cold, and his voice carried an oppressive metallic quality.

"The evil god's believers are indeed becoming more impudent.

"Since some deities can't shoulder such a heavy responsibility, let us share Their burden."

Lumian could sense Mr. K's anger igniting as his Pyromaniac potion was showing signs of digestion.

After bidding farewell to Mr. K, he left the basement and closed his eyes in the corridor.

Through this experiment, combined with the fire in his heart when he advanced to Pyromaniac, Franca's words, the various situations in the market district, and the actions of the people of Rapus and the Southern Continent, he concluded his first Pyromaniac acting principle: "Pyromaniacs not only ignite matter but also the mind and society."

In the market district, Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian gazed at the enticing green liquor bottle, contemplating the need for sturdy military flasks to prevent it from breaking during a potential fight. Simultaneously, he made the final decision—to utilize the Lucky One Beyonders characteristic and the Shadow Branch to create a mystical item.

He felt that Decency's powers didn't mesh well with the Shadow Branch, and its drawbacks were manageable. On the other hand, Sealed Artifacts offered decent effects and could be used independently.

Without any hesitation, Lumian penned a letter, seeking Madam Magician's aid in locating a demigod-level Artisan.

Afterward, he made his way to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches, summoned the messenger, and dispatched the Shadow Branch and Lucky One Beyonder characteristic, along with the letter, to the holder of the Major Arcana card.

In no time, Lumian spotted the puppet messenger materializing above the desk, dropping a thick stack of papers with a loud thud.

Bang!

The table groaned under the weight of the hefty object.

Lumian rose to his feet and noticed a response placed on top of the stack.

“No problem. I'll assist you in making contact. The process will take some time, as will the crafting of the item. If you don't mind, I'll add a condition that the final product should be portable.”

“Additionally, while observing celestial phenomena, I sensed that you are on the verge of assimilating the Pyromaniac potion and can endure a new Inevitability boon. Here's information about some creatures from the spirit world. You can study it beforehand and explore which contracts you might form to borrow their abilities.”

Madam Magician possesses knowledge of astromancy? Her predictions are remarkably accurate... Lumian felt a bit lightheaded as he glanced at the substantial stack of papers.

Having summarized the core principle of his initial Pyromaniac acting, he knew he wasn't far from fully digesting it.

## Chapter 305 Test

Lumian took his time with the thick stack of information on spirit world creatures. He stowed them and Aurore's grimoires in an iron cabinet he had acquired earlier.

But now, there were other pressing matters at hand.

Unscrewing the lid of a wide-mouthed bottle, he reached into the green liquor to retrieve the Scotch Broom brooch known as Decency.

...

His plan was to test the Sealed Artifact's abilities and its negative effects.

Waiting for a real battle wouldn't do; he needed to familiarize himself with it now. Figuring it out on the fly during a fight would be disastrous, leaving him unable to coordinate his Beyonder powers and attacks effectively.

He also wanted to test the extent of the brooch's adverse effects while he was still in good shape. After a battle that had taken a toll on his body and mind, it would be too risky to face those effects hastily.

Understanding the brooch's negative effects in advance would allow Lumian to make better choices when forced to use Decency, minimizing its influence on him.

A Hunter who wasn't familiar with their weapon was bound to fail!

Lumian placed the Scotch Broom brooch on the table before him, focusing his mind to sense its power.

As he did so, a gust of wind blew in from the open window, making his heart race. He quickly stood up, extended his right hand, and shut the window tight.

The moment the window closed, the room fell eerily silent, as if it had been sealed off from the outside world.

Lumian then walked over to the door, gently opening and closing it.

It seemed like the safe house had turned into a secluded sanctuary.

Seating himself again, Lumian exuded an aura that could provoke disgust and hatred in small animals—this was an application of Provocation.

Almost instantly, a rat appeared from nowhere, snarling and attacking him with its claws.

Without much effort, Lumian flicked his index finger and thumb, and a crimson spark shot out, incinerating the rat as it squealed in pain.

The rat desperately tried to escape while suffering the scorching pain, but the invisible force sealed all exits, leaving it trapped.

It lacked the ability to open a door.

Lumian nodded with satisfaction, using the rat to test the other abilities of the Decency brooch.

The test lasted for about 12 to 13 minutes, but Lumian couldn't be sure without a pocket watch. He decided to proceed with caution and removed the Decency brooch, throwing it into a container of green liquor.

Then, with another small crimson fireball, he ended the rat's life, filling the room with the smell of roasted fat.

After stowing away the container, Lumian left the safe house, ready to test the brooch's repellent effect on others.

The gas street lamps were already lit as he stepped out, and he immediately noticed the glares of pedestrians and vendors around him.

It felt as if they despised him deeply, wanting to attack him with knives, bottles of alcohol, or even an iron pot filled with food.

However, “Lion” Ciel's trademark golden-and-black hair seemed to deter them from acting on their impulses.

Th-this effect is equivalent to a large-scale Provocation... However, it's not within my control... Lumian assessed roughly, realizing that he couldn't fully control it. Under the unfriendly gazes, he walked along the roadside and made his way towards Avenue du Marché.

At that moment, two police officers dressed in black uniforms, their shoulders adorned with silver epaulets, and armed with revolvers strolled by the area.

Catching sight of Lumian, they immediately pointed at him and bellowed, "Halt right there! Routine inspection!"

The effects are truly potent... Lumian didn't waste a breath and swiftly turned on his heels, dashing away.

"Stop!"

The two officers shouted, drawing their revolvers and taking aim at Lumian.

He skillfully evaded a pedestrian's sneaky attempt to trip him, making a sharp turn into an alleyway blocked by a barricade. Without glancing back, he hurried into Underground Trier.

He hadn't brought his carbide lamp, nor did he possess night vision. However, as a Pyromaniac, he could conjure light in any environment.

Crimson fireballs materialized above Lumian's head and on his shoulders, illuminating his path. Easily outpacing the police officers, he made his way toward another Underground Trier entrance near Rue des Blouses Blanches.

As he walked, Lumian abruptly twisted his body, narrowly avoiding a black shadow that lunged from a corner.

It was a snake-like creature with bluish-black scales.

The creature reared up, flicking its bright-red forked tongue in an aggressive stance, challenging Lumian.

It doesn't only arouse disgust and disdain from humans... They need to see or make contact with me to be influenced... Lumian sighed and shook his head, allowing one of the fireballs to shoot out and reduce the venomous snake into three charred pieces, emitting a burnt fragrance.

Having already gauged the strength and reach of the negative effects, he decided not to take any more risks. He found a nearby empty cave, extinguished the fireballs, and sat in the darkness, quietly waiting for the effects to wear off.

After what seemed like an hour, he stood up and conjured three crimson fireballs above his head, left shoulder, and right shoulder to illuminate the tunnel ahead.

In no time, Lumian found himself at an exit near Rue des Blouses Blanches. There, he spotted a figure with a carbide lamp emerging from a nearby tunnel.

With a grin, Lumian raised his right hand in a wave.

"Well, well, look who's wandering in Underground Trier like a rat."

It was Jenna.

As she caught sight of Lumian, her brow furrowed.

“Did you use Provocation on me? Why are you so irritating?”

Lumian replied vaguely, “Something like that.”

Jenna couldn't hide her annoyance and blurted, “Dammit! Why did you use Provocation on me?”

Not bad. You didn't come over to beat me up. That means you still treat me as a friend... That's probably how strong the negative effects are when they're about to disappear... He smiled and explained,

“I encountered something that left me tainted with a dreadful aura, but it will soon fade away.”

Shifting gears, Lumian examined Jenna, who wore a light-white shirt and a faded yellow dress. Her hair cascaded down her back, and she wore a small Sun Sacred Emblem around her neck.

“What brings you to Underground Trier?”

Jenna, now looking more like a college student in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, pursed her lips and replied, “Meeting the two Purifiers. I wanted to show my devotion to god as you suggested. So I dressed in a way that the Church advocates, even wearing a Sun Talisman. But they guided me to Underground Trier, claiming it was to avoid crowds. Dammit, it's just absurd to go around here dressed like this!”

As the negative effects of Decency waned, Jenna understood why she reacted strongly and calmly shared her experiences with Lumian.

“Did it work?” Lumian glanced at the brown wooden box in Jenna's right hand but didn't rush to ask what it contained.

Puzzled, Jenna inquired, “Yes, it did. Valentine, the Purifier, became much more receptive to me. Imre also changed, but they seem to be cautious and suspicious of me for some reason.”

“Maybe they think you're trying to ingratiate yourself and have ulterior motives,” Lumian speculated, attempting to analyze the Purifiers' mindset. He pointed at the wooden box Jenna was carrying with his chin. “Is that their reward for you?”

Jenna couldn't help but smile.

“Exactly. They verified the information about Deep Valley Quarry and acknowledged its importance. As compensation, they gave me two main ingredients and one supplementary ingredient for the Instigator potion. I'll collect the rest myself.”

“Franca probably has the rest of the supplementary ingredients.” Lumian mused. “The main ingredient for a Sequence 8 potion isn't cheap, it's precious, you know. Is the information about Deep Valley Quarry really that important?”

What did this entail?

Jenna tersely acknowledged his words.

“They didn't elaborate much. The only thing they said was that the Purifiers can't directly enter the quarry due to issues between the Churches. But they'll keep an eye on it to prevent things from escalating.”

“They also want me to keep contacting the client to get more information from him. Apparently, part of the main ingredients for the potion is an advance payment,” Jenna explained.

Lumian nodded approvingly. “Makes sense.”

Jenna sighed. “I'm such a degenerate.”

“Why do you say that?” Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Jenna grabbed her hair. “I should have asked for enough money to pay off my debts before even thinking about the ingredients for the Instigator potion.”

“When you become an Instigator, that money won't be a problem,” Lumian scoffed. “You're not planning to stick around as a local singer forever to repay your debts, are you?”

Jenna fell silent for a moment before admitting, “But I don't want to harm anyone.”

“Why not just target villains?” Lumian tried to ignite Jenna's determination.

“Damn it, you're the Instigator, not me, right?” Jenna muttered, adding, “How much should I pay Franca? We got the information together; it's not fair if she doesn't get anything.”

Lumian chuckled. “Considering the potion formula she gave you, even with a friend's discount, you should pay her a minimum of 20,000 verl d'or.”

“20,000 verl d'or minimum...” Jenna's face showed a hint of pain. “For now, I can only owe her. Do you think I'll accumulate more debt the higher my Sequence? The potion formula and ingredients are so expensive...”

“But your earning potential will increase,” Lumian half-instigated, half-comforted.

He extinguished the three fireballs on his body and headed toward the exit of Underground Trier, Jenna's carbide lamp lighting their way.

After a few steps, Jenna asked with curiosity, “Why did you create fireballs above your head and both shoulders? What's the point?”

“Haven't you heard of people carrying three lamps—one above their head, one on their left shoulder, and one on their right shoulder?” Lumian asked.

“No,” Jenna shook her head, intrigued, “Is it some mystical knowledge?”

“Nah, just folklore,” Lumian smiled. “I thought it looked cool, so I went with it.” Jenna couldn't help but curse, “Dammit! You're so childish!”

As they chatted, they left Underground Trier and entered Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, where Franca gave them a suspicious look.

#### Chapter 306 Ambivalence

Lumian calmly recounted his encounter with Jenna in the depths of Underground Trier while he was enduring the air of repulsion and disdain.

Franca gave a slightly awkward smile and deftly changed the topic.

“How can you be repulsive and detestable? You didn't lose control.”

...

Franca had encountered Beyonders on the Hunter pathway succumbing to a loss of control numerous times, most of them exuding traits that attracted hostility from those around them. This was the principal reason they were swiftly dealt with.

Lumian briefly explained, “I obtained a Sealed Artifact. Its negative effects manifest an hour after I remove it, causing me to exude repulsion and disdain.”

Jenna, curious, interjected, “What happens if you don't take it off?”

Lumian's lips curled as he replied, “Then it turns into an alarm, drawing the attention of nearby official Beyonders who'd like to apprehend me.”

“It's quite the attention-seeker,” Franca remarked with a playful grin.

“It does have a fondness for ‘decency,’” Lumian said, his tone meaningful. Then, he added nonchalantly, “Its abilities lean heavily towards Bribe, with a touch of Distortion.”

Given the likelihood of needing to collaborate with Franca in the future to deal with Padre Guillaume Bénét, Lumian took the initiative to divulge the situation regarding the Decency brooch. However, he refrained from delving into intricate details, especially regarding the strength and range of its powers. After all, mystical items were a Beyonder's ace in the hole. Exposing them risked a sense of vulnerability. Just as Franca had shared information about the Ring of Punishment while omitting the brass revolver and other items during their earlier operation.

It was a delicate balance—sharing yet withholding the full truth; building trust while maintaining essential precautions.

Franca didn't press further. She pondered for a moment before saying, “It corresponds to a Sequence 7 Briber and a Sequence 6 Baron of Corruption from the Black Emperor pathway. It seems a Baron of Corruption met his end, melding his Beyonder traits with the objects on him to create the Sealed Artifact. Its abilities aren't fully revealed.”

“Black Emperor?” Lumian had never heard of this Sequence, nor had Jenna.

“The deity appellation for the Lawyer pathway,” Franca whispered, excitement in her voice. “Rumor has it that Emperor Roselle achieved Black Emperor status before his demise—a true deity!”

For a brief moment, Lumian and Jenna were rendered speechless. Their expressions mirrored their astonishment.

Franca couldn't accurately fathom Emperor Roselle's standing in their eyes as genuine Intisians. Had he—no, had He truly ascended to godhood?

“Rumors, mere rumors,” Franca hastened to add, lest her dependable image be tarnished in Jenna's eyes.

After a few more exchanges, Jenna opened the wooden box in her right hand, revealing the smaller boxes within.

They contained a small, dark, hive-like heart, a sac exuding dark green liquid, and a slender, smoked tube-like substance.

Franca scrutinized them briefly before giving a nod of approval.

“The heart of the Demon Throat Honeyguide and the poison sac of the Dark Prowler—these are the main ingredients. Yes, the Dark Prowler is a peculiar two-headed snake.

“You've also acquired the Demon Throat Honeyguide's syrxinx. You only need blue Jimsonweed juice, fern powder, walnuts, and pure water.. I have the blue Jimsonweed juice. The other three supplementary ingredients are easy to come by.”

Fern powder... Lumian recalled the supplemental ingredient for the Provoker potion shared a similarity. It implied being “susceptible to others' words.”

In that light, Instigator and Provoker bore resemblance. Hunter and Demoness truly were neighboring, interchangeable pathways.

Noticing Jenna's keenness to buy ferns and walnuts from the right shops and prepare pure water overnight, Franca cautioned, “Hold on a moment. Set yourself straight first. You've digested the Assassin potion, and chances of losing control with the Instigator potion are slim these days, but why not aim for the best? Wouldn't it be wiser to minimize the chance of losing control entirely?”

Lumian scratched his chin and added, “I'm curious what kind of monster an Instigator would end up as after losing control.”

Jenna shot him a glare and settled onto the sofa, shutting her eyes and focusing on her breath.

Lumian sprawled in the armchair next to him, his arms draped over the armrests. He turned to Franca and inquired, “Have you gotten your hands on genuine mummy ashes?”

“Nope,” Franca shook her head, a touch of helplessness in her expression. “I even offered 500 verl d'or for 10 grams, but those guys keep pushing fakes. Worthless bunch. They can't even tell the real from the fake!”

“Only 500 verl d'or?” Lumian teased. “Aren't you rolling in it?”

“Normally, 10 grams go for just over 100 verl d'or. 500 is already a small fortune, alright?” Franca snapped back, her frustration evident. “And I'm not exactly swimming in money at the moment.”

Lumian nodded, getting why Franca's funds were running dry.

Her infiltration of the Iron and Blood Cross Order wasn't a true success. It could only be considered as aiding Lumian in reaching the goal. So, the reward she received wasn't the main ingredients for the Demoneess of Pleasure, but rather the privilege to buy them at a discount.

“How much more do you need?” Jenna's eyes popped open, a willingness to help evident in her gaze.

Franca shook her head and replied, “If 500 verl d'or can't get me the real stuff, neither will a grand. They'll just think I'm a fool, waiting for me to bid higher.”

She then turned her gaze to Lumian.

“What's your plan for now?”

Given time, she could likely snag actual mummy ashes in a fortnight or a month. However, Lumian needed her assistance within the next week, pushing her to consider searching for true mummies in the Star Highlands of the Southern Continent.

Lumian caught onto Franca's unspoken message and mused, “Maybe consider a little arson and digesting the potion to some extent.”

This way, he could unlock the Contractee boon, garnering diverse abilities from different creatures through contracts.

As far as he knew, a freshly minted Contractee could only forge three contracts. Lumian intended to cherry-pick three from the four possible abilities: ones that impacted the Spirit Body or psyche, basic teleportation skills, a moderate level of disguise, and an ability akin to invisibility or shadow blending.

The final choice hinged on the information on creatures from the spirit realm. Maybe the willing creatures suitable for a contract with Lumian didn't wield matching skills.

Lumian was sure of one thing—all spirit world creatures could traverse the spirit realm—a basic form of teleportation. The variance lay in swiftness. If he struck a pact with White Paper, perhaps he'd manage only ten to twenty meters per jump. Not the optimal choice for traversing to the Southern Continent—exhaustion would likely make him lose control long before he arrived there.

“Arson... What's your thinking?” Franca sat cross-legged in the recliner.

Lumian recounted the acting principle he had deduced about the Pyromaniac.

Franca shared her insight based on her own experiences. “Upright acting is incitement, and inverted acting is instigation. They can all help you digest the potion. Wouldn't that be easy? Go down to the docks tomorrow and incite the dockworkers into a strike. The rallying cry will be for better pay.”

Lumian shook his head slowly.

“If I can rally them into a strike and there's a good chance it'll get them some benefits or help them achieve their goals, I'll give it a shot. But if it's only going to bring disaster upon them, I'm not so keen on it.

“I can't stand exploiting others without benefiting them and causing harm instead—unless there's no other way. Then anyone can be sacrificed.

“Once there was this guy who always said that we could only grab more and have enough food if we united. But when we did unite to fight others for food, he took advantage of the chaos and made off with the food.”

“You've got quite a bit of experience.” Franca studied Lumian anew, feeling that he wasn't just as simple as Muggle's brother.

Jenna had been through similar situations.

Franca sighed and said, “As expected, you're quite the instigator in the upright sense. I'd be the same if I were you. Though I can put up a tough front, truth be told... haha, I can't bring myself to do it.”

Lumian regarded her thoughtfully and spoke,

“I find you a bit paradoxical. Sometimes you're seasoned, well-informed, and have a knack for analyzing things. Other times, you're foolish, innocent, and naive.”

Lumian had only encountered such a contradictory disposition in one other person—his sister Aurore.

Stirred by Lumian's string of words, Franca blurted out, “Are you trying to provoke me? How am I foolish or naive?”

At this, she caught Jenna's disapproving glance.

“Ahem.” Franca cleared her throat and went on, “It's because I have this core kindness and certain expectations for the world. Even after seeing how harsh life can be, I still cherish life. Sigh, most in my group are like that. Only a few are resilient, brilliant, and agile. They seem to never be daunted by hardships or moral dilemmas.”  
The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society? Why do they have such similarities?  
Lumian nodded, choosing not to probe further.

With Jenna's plan to gather the remaining supplemental ingredients the following day to advance as an Instigator, Lumian swiftly departed from Rue des Blouses Blanches and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he made his way up the stairs, Lumian caught sight of Anthony Reid, the information broker, coming down with a suitcase.

“Moving out?” Lumian inquired.

“That's right.” Anthony Reid, still donning his military-green camouflage, gave a slight nod.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Didn't you mention some unfinished business in the market district?"

"The lead's gone cold." Anthony Reid let out a soft sigh.

Gone cold? Suddenly, Lumian recalled having seen a parliamentary election poster in the other man's room. He prodded, "Because Hugues Artois is dead?"

### Chapter 307 Instigation

Upon hearing Lumian's question, Anthony Reid, his round face slightly pudgy and his skin with a slight sheen, fixed his dark brown eyes on him for a moment before responding, "I'm not sure what you're getting at."

The information broker's emotions appeared steady, and his expression seemed unaffected. It was almost as if Hugues Artois's demise hadn't affected him in the least.

Lumian's grin widened, and he didn't press further. Pointing toward the lower level, he suggested, "Let me buy you a drink. You've aided me in the past, and we've fought side by side. Consider it a parting gesture."

...

Anthony Reid scratched his retreating, light-yellow hairline with his free hand, his other holding a suitcase, pondering briefly before conceding, "Okay."

Descending the narrow, gas-lit staircase, the duo entered the basement bar and settled at the counter.

"What's your poison?" Lumian inquired in a casual tone, as if he'd just stepped into his own abode.

"Fennel absinthe," Anthony Reid replied succinctly.

"Absinthe, eh?" Lumian chuckled, producing a *verl d'or* silver coin and four copper coins. He tossed them to the barkeep, Pavard Neeson, who sported a ponytail. "Two glasses of Somersault."

Somersault was bar parlance, signifying a double serving of fennel absinthe and a measure of "little mummy."

The latter took seven licks, while the former required twelve.

Pavard Neeson deftly flipped over standard cups and filled them with a dreamy green liquid for Lumian and Anthony Reid.

As Lumian took a sip, he savored the familiar bitterness and revitalization. He observed Pavard Neeson, whose dark brown beard framed his lips, muttering in a low, ingratiating tone,

"Ciel, got any of them peculiar drugs?"

The bar owner and amateur painter believed that Ciel, a notorious mob leader, surely possessed a couple of routes for obtaining proscribed substances.

Lumian caressed the glass with his thumb and smiled, inquiring, "What kind of drug are you after?"

Recognizing that Anthony Reid was an information broker often entangled in illicit affairs, Pavard Neeson did not hold back, explaining in hushed tones,

“Banned psychotropic drugs. Sigh, when that odd tree affected me, I created the draft I was most proud of. Actually, it wasn't just my most satisfying piece; it embodied the aesthetics I'd always strived for but never reached. It perfectly channeled my thoughts and convictions. Since then, that sensation's eluded me completely. Every stroke of mine has turned into dogsh\*t! I'm considering experimenting with psychotropic drugs, hoping to recapture that sensation.”

Lumian took another sip of the misty absinthe, his lips curling in a derisive smile,

“If I were you, I'd steer clear of painting altogether. You lack the innate aptitude.”

Without waiting for Pavard Neeson's retort, he chuckled and stated, “Relying on drugs for passable creations signifies your dearth of talent!”

“But many famous painters have resorted to it...” Pavard Neeson began, only to be cut off by Lumian. He clicked his tongue and interjected, “That's an indication their creative faculties are waning, their fountain of inspiration drying up.

“Isn't that cheating? Pitting drug-fueled works against those of other artists, barely eking out a victory. Earning a spot in an exhibition and proudly proclaiming to every visitor: ‘Behold, I'm despicable. I possess an inferiority complex. Drugs are my prowess, and demons are my parents.’”

Seeing Pavard Neeson's visage turn ashen, Lumian spread his arms slightly, probing, “Does that fill you with pride?”

“Should you possess talent, you'd no longer be an amateur painter. Even if critical acclaim eluded you, and the World's Artists Exhibition snubbed you, private galleries would come seeking. You understand the harsh reality better than I do.”

At this juncture, Lumian's smile broadened.

“Drugs won't save you. It's available to all, like a common commodity. When everyone resorts to it, won't they be pitted against their innate skill and standards?”

Pavard Neeson's lips quivered, yet he remained speechless.

With a somber expression, he took a couple of steps back, slumping into his seat, as if his spirit had vacated his body.

Anthony Reid, who had been quietly sipping fennel absinthe, turned his gaze to Lumian. “You're not a fan of those forbidden psychiatric drugs?”

“Otherwise?” Lumian scoffed.

Anthony Reid shifted his attention to Pavard Neeson, visibly grappling with his inner turmoil, and spoke contemplatively. “You seem to have swayed him.”

“I merely stoked the embers of his guilt,” Lumian replied with calm composure.

Anthony Reid nodded gently. “But what if your persuasion falls short?”

Lumian laughed. “I’m not his godfather.”

If he couldn't sway him, so be it.

A brief pause fell upon Anthony Reid before he turned his gaze back to Lumian.

“Your method of dissuasion deviates from your usual approach. Is this acting?”

Impressively observant and astute, as expected from a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Spectator pathway... If I can kindle the inner fervor within a Spectator's heart, it should greatly aid my digestion... Lumian mused inwardly. Holding his glass of verdant liquid, he looked ahead and replied, “I stumbled upon some fliers earlier. They made mention of Hugues Artois deserting his troops during the war against the Loen Kingdom a few years back, leading to countless casualties.”

Anthony Reid remained silent, savoring his fennel absinthe in quietude.

Lumian's gaze flickered toward the vacant bar counter as he continued, “I recall you wrestled with the lingering effects of PTSD from that war a few years ago.”

With a gulp, Anthony Reid took a swig of the green liquor.

Lumian opted to not bring up the parliamentary election poster found in the information broker's room. He glanced at the vacant shell that was Pavard Neeson and mumbled to himself, “If the sole motivation is animosity towards Hugues Artois, then news of his assassination would be met with jubilation and him drinking until he dropped at the bar.

“But if one wishes to unravel the reason behind Hugues Artois's actions, understand how he wormed his way into politics and a parliamentary bid despite his past, and uncover the strings being pulled in his favor, one must seek out other breadcrumbs to grant the departed some semblance of peace.

“The official Beyonders should be on this case, but they labor under too many constraints. They lack the untamed boldness of wild Beyonders.”

Seated still, Anthony Reid took another swig of fennel absinthe.

Lumian chuckled.

“It's indeed a vexing conundrum. The hurdles are countless, and the perils are real. Surrender becomes a tempting option for everyone. In the end, though, Hugues Artois lies deceased. The instigator of that tragedy rests in the grave. The departed souls should find some solace.”

Anthony Reid ceased his imbibing, his middle-aged visage betraying no emotion.

Lumian glanced his way, lowered his tone, and smiled knowingly.

“Folks plagued by severe mental ills can't ascend far in the Spectator path. And even if they do plateau, external stimuli can trigger catastrophic lapses, transforming them into monstrosities. In this ever-more perilous world, stability is but a distant wish for flawed Beyonders.”

At this juncture, Lumian reined in his expression and fixed his gaze upon Anthony Reid's profile. He inquired, his voice resonating with gravitas, "Do you fancy departing laden with remorse and reluctance, languishing in the throes of becoming a monster, shying away from your former comrades, or do you dare venture forth in pursuit of the truth, courting danger, and crafting your own heroic saga?"

Without acknowledging Anthony Reid's response, Lumian gracefully alighted from the barstool, lifted his fennel absinthe, and downed the remainder in a single gulp.

With that, he whispered into Anthony Reid's ear, "I contributed to Hugues Artois's demise. We're still untangling his problem."

Observing Anthony Reid's slight tremor, Lumian straightened up and exited the subterranean bar without casting a backward glance.

He strolled back into Room 207, not bothering to shut the door behind him, and lit the carbide lamp.

With a casual swivel, he spun the chair around and settled into it, his posture easy as he fixated on the dim corridor outside.

Lumian waited in abnormal silence, as he held a certainty that the figure he awaited would materialize.

As moments ticked away, the couple's voices escalated into a quarrel anew, and the rowdy drunkards began to trickle onto the street.

The soft patter of hesitant steps drew near Room 207, each sound echoing the uncertainty.

A sly grin played upon Lumian's lips, and he reclined in the chair, his gaze steady on the door.

Before too long, Anthony Reid stepped into view, garbed in a military-green shirt and matching pants, capped off by tall leather boots. His hair lay cropped and thin.

Standing within the circle of light cast by the carbide lamp, he regarded Lumian seated at the wooden table, a smirk adorning his lips. His features danced in a contorted display.

In a rich timbre, he intoned, "I know you're trying to provoke me. I know you're acting, but... you're correct..."

Anthony Reid, middle-aged and weathered, raised his right hand and pressed it to his chest, his expression one of fierce resolve.

"Over these past few years, my heart has been seared by anguish and righteous anger."

A knowing smile graced Lumian's face as he shut his eyes momentarily, sensing the Pyromaniac potion digesting a little.

He rose from his seat and addressed Anthony Reid, saying, "Truth wields the mightiest power of persuasion."

Anthony Reid felt a weight lift after speaking, the inner conflict and confusion subsiding.

He ventured into Room 207, the door clicking shut behind him. His eyes swept over the surroundings in a swift assessment.

“Did you truly eliminate Hugues Artois? How deep did your investigation penetrate?”

“Celia Bello, the one who assassinated Hugues Artois, is a friend of mine. It was I who first unearthed the heretic cults supporting Hugues Artois,” Lumian responded in a matter-of-fact tone before extending a sincere apology. “My earlier words held a deceit, and for that, I’m sorry.”

Anthony Reid was taken aback.

“Which statement?”

A mischievous grin curved Lumian's lips.

“Actually, we haven't even embarked on the trail to uncover the people and forces behind Hugues Artois.”

#### Chapter 308 Incomprehensible Choice

The plump, middle-aged Anthony Reid found himself taken aback. But after a brief moment, he grinned in a self-deprecating way and uttered, “I was so rattled that I couldn't even judge the authenticity of that sentence. As anticipated, a Spectator must take a seat in the audience.”

Lumian remained calmly seated, his smile unwavering.

“No, it's not that simple. Why did I leap off the barstool? Why did I murmur into your ear from behind? My aim was to shield you from my subtle expressions and involuntary body language. In those moments, your emotions were already stirred, blurring your ability to decipher my true intent.”

...

A short pause followed Anthony Reid's contemplative silence, then he spoke,

“That's one reason. Another lies in your characteristic demeanor. I don't know if you've caught on, but you tend to put on a bit of a show, appear nonchalant, or in modern terms, act cool.

“Just then, I believed those actions, given the circumstances, were in line with your usual behavior, aimed at lending weight to your words. So, suspicion didn't even cross my mind.”

A chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

“It's only natural for a lad like me to yearn for a touch of coolness, a bit of swagger. It also conveniently masks my true motives. Actually, both are genuine. That's why they remain impervious to scrutiny.”

It was akin to him having Fire Ravens circling him with one hand in his pocket, unleashing them on his adversaries as he advanced. First, it was undeniably cool, and second, he seized the chance to grasp Mr. K's finger to avert any potential mishaps.

Anthony Reid pondered momentarily before nodding.

“Only a superficial motive, steeped in authenticity, can truly deceive a Spectator.”

Raising his right foot over his left knee, Lumian steered the conversation back on track.

“Our journey to unveil the people and forces behind Hugues Artois hasn't yet commenced, as we are engaged in more pressing matters. But fear not, we shall delve into this matter next week. We possess the relevant sources of information as well.”

Lumian's strategy involved Jenna delving deeper into Hugues Artois's background through the Purifiers, exploring ways she could “assist.”

As the one responsible for Hugues Artois's demise, it was logical for Jenna to keep tabs on the investigation's progress, hoping to unearth all details without arousing the official Beyonders' suspicion. These thoughts and tendencies were inherent in Jenna, so Lumian didn't need to fuel them further. Just a reminder would suffice.

In due course, the Purifiers could subtly guide Jenna and her companions toward actions they might find inconvenient. This would undeniably supply Anthony Reid's investigation with invaluable leads.

Anthony Reid's deep brown eyes mirrored Lumian's figure as he absorbed the discourse in silence.

The information broker offered an almost imperceptible nod.

“I'll stay a while longer.”

Engaging with Spectators of the Beyond path is straightforward. There's no need to concoct another tale or search for an excuse to sway him. He can ascertain the truth for himself... Lumian flashed a grin and gestured toward the bed. “Take a seat.”

This way, he needn't expose Jenna's true identity or her role as a Purifier informant.

Anthony Reid stood near the door, rooted in place, and spoke, “You've more or less sussed out what's happened to me. Is there something else you want me to add?”

“I'd prefer a more detailed account,” Lumian responded without much ceremony.

Having been through the Poison Spur Mob, the Bliss Society, the Cordu catastrophe, Ruhr and Michel's deaths, and the explosion at the Goodville Chemical Factory, Lumian found the evil gods and their minions abnormally repulsive. His casual demeanor had been replaced by a newfound seriousness.

Once, he'd believed that people could fancy whatever beliefs they pleased—that it didn't concern him. Now, his perspective had entirely changed. He held that only heretics who'd gone to their grave were the good ones. The living ones were ticking time bombs of doom, liable to unleash havoc on him and his companions sooner or later.

So, he wasn't just spinning tales for Anthony Reid. He truly planned on delving into Hugues Artois' affairs and uncovering more of those heretics when he could spare a moment.

Moreover, this could endear him to Mr. K and the Aurora Order.

Of course, it did seem quite odd for a wanted mob leader to be lending a hand to the authorities in taking down cultists.

Anthony Reid's expression darkened as he said, "Towards the end of the war with the Loen Kingdom, my comrades and I were stationed at a vital route in the northern foothills of the Hornacis mountain range. Our commanding officer was Major Hugues Artois.

"We were split into three companies, each at different positions. We were to prevent small Loen Kingdom Beyonder teams from crossing the treacherous path and attacking us from the rear, as well as defend against direct assaults.

"That night, gunshots and cannon fire suddenly shattered my sleep. I watched as my comrades were torn apart, one by one, from behind. Their heads exploding, bodies rent asunder. The earth became a sea of blood..."

At this point, Anthony Reid's breath quickened, as if he was reliving the trauma.

He paused for a moment before continuing, "In the midst of that war, I had a fortuitous encounter that pushed my Sequence upward. I never reported it to Hugues Artois. Using my newfound abilities, I managed to break through the encirclement with four wounded comrades and retreated.

"Two of them were gravely hurt and were left behind on the mountain path for— forever. I can still see their pained and angry gazes.

"At first, I thought maybe one of the other positions had been compromised, or that Loen's airships had dropped troops behind us under cover of darkness. But later, I realized that the reason was that Hugues Artois's company had chosen to retreat without informing us, after encountering only a probing attack!"

Lumian pondered for a moment before replying, "When Hugues Artois ordered the retreat, didn't those soldiers question it? Didn't they try to get word to the other two positions?"

"Hugues Artois was our commanding officer, and he knew how to give rousing speeches. Plus, he had a warrant supposedly signed by General Philip," Anthony Reid said, his expression grim. "The soldiers back then assumed he had already passed on orders to the other positions. I still can't wrap my head around why he'd sacrifice us. It wouldn't have taken much time or caused him any harm."

"Maybe he was overwhelmed and forgot," Lumian suggested, not out to defend the late Hugues Artois, merely offering a possible explanation.

Anthony Reid shook his head.

"He wasn't a green recruit on his first battlefield. He had proven his mettle in prior fights, showed his leadership under duress."

Lumian didn't delve further, allowing Anthony Reid to continue.

“Once we found out the truth, the three of us fought to bring Hugues Artois to military court, but it was futile. They'd simply tell us that imagination wasn't evidence.

“Helpless, we watched Hugues Artois shift into politics after the war and rise through the ranks.

“My other two comrades were frail to start with. They passed away burdened by fury and pain. When Hugues Artois threw his hat in the ring for the Enlightenment Party in the market district's parliamentary election, I ended up here.”

Lumian nodded slightly and inquired, “Being an information broker, that's to hide your true identity?”

“No, I've been scraping by as an information broker for a few years now,” Anthony Reid replied with a wry smile. “Plus, this cover helps me dig deeper into Hugues Artois' dealings.”

“Any breakthroughs?” Lumian asked naturally.

Anthony Reid's expression darkened as he answered, “Hugues Artois' foray into politics seems unremarkable. He rode General Philip's coattails and climbed the ladder. His eloquence caught the eye of several senior Enlightenment Party MPs. And he forged ties with a handful of ex-noble families.”

“Is General Philip a concern?” Lumian queried, straightforward as ever.

Anthony Reid sighed slowly, his voice heavy, “The general met his end before I could investigate him. Official word is—illness took him.”

Lumian posed a few more questions before saying, “I'll catch up with you when I've got more to share.”

“Sure.” Anthony Reid understood Lumian's sincerity.

After departing Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian made his way back to the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches. He swung open the iron cabinet, retrieving a hefty stack of information concerning the denizens of the spirit world.

Within the assortment, he discovered a notebook labeled ‘Sights in the Spirit World.’ Flipping through a couple of pages, he could feel a surge of frustration and anxiety creeping into his mind.

His immediate aim wasn't to grasp the intricacies of the spirit world, but rather to pinpoint suitable creatures from that realm. Thus, he closed the notebook and delved into the introductions of the various spirit world entities.

Somewhat inexplicably, after poring over the pages for over half an hour, Lumian sensed his mental energy draining away. His thoughts seemed to evaporate, forcing him to bring his study session to an abrupt close. He sprawled out on the bed, drifting into slumber.

Early the next morning, Lumian arrived at Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, and rang the doorbell.

Franca had already risen from her sleep, attired in her customary shirt and breeches. She directed her gaze towards Lumian and inquired, "What brings you here so early?"

Lumian's eyes flicked towards Jenna, who occupied the living room, a smile tugging at his lips.

"Isn't today the day Jenna advances to being an Instigator? I'm here to witness the moment."

A frown played across Franca's features as she muttered, "You seem quite concerned about her."

"Absolutely," Lumian affirmed, his grin widening. "Once she's an Instigator, she can aid me in dealing with Guillaume Bénét. While I can't exactly count on her for a direct confrontation, she'll excel at launching sneak attacks and surveying the surroundings to forestall any potential mishaps."

Jenna emitted a derisive snort, while Franca offered a mix of exasperation and amusement through a tongue click. "Your words are like honey."

"The kind that's already been digested?" Lumian chuckled, his self-awareness evident.

#### Chapter 309 Restoring Confidence

Naturally, Franca caught onto Lumian's true intentions; otherwise, her Instigator potion would've been a wasted effort. She felt satisfied that Lumian was one who wouldn't falter in a battle of sophistry, and she hoped he could maintain that.

"Come on in." Franca gestured for Lumian to step into the living room.

Right then, boxes already occupied the coffee table, containing Demon Throat Honeyguide and other ingredients.

...

Simply glancing at these items stirred something in Lumian, an urge to devour them.

Thankfully, it wasn't overwhelming. It was more like hungry folks eyeing a chef grilling lamb.

Jenna's focus had returned to the ingredients. Gazing at the white porcelain broth bowl with its dual handles and cover, she found it absurd that she was going to consume it the same way she had consumed the Assassin potion.

How was this potion concoction? It seemed more like cocktail mixing or broth preparation!

Mysticism was nowhere to be found!

Jenna inhaled deeply, then poured 100 milliliters of pure water into the broth bowl using a measuring cylinder. She added the Demon Throat Honeyguide and the Dark Prowler poison sac.

Amidst the bubbling sounds, the two main ingredients fused in the pure water.

A manifestation of the law of Beyonder characteristics convergence... Lumian observed closely, holding his words.

Franca carefully unsheathed a ritual dagger and conjured a wall of spirituality around the living room.

The hive-like heart and the dark-green poison sac began to dissolve simultaneously, coloring the pure water in the white porcelain bowl with a gleaming black hue.

Jenna then added the syrxinx of the Demon Throat Honeyguide, five drops of blue Jimsonweed juice, and 10 grams of fern powder. Finally, she tossed in an unpeeled walnut.

Watching the walnut disappear as if swallowed by crimson molten steel, Jenna couldn't help but feel a shiver of fear.

Can this thing really be drunk?

“Not bad. It's exactly like the Instigator potion I brewed before,” Franca commended with an easy smile.

Of course it's the same. Concocting a potion is that simple... Lumian thought to himself.

Franca waved her hand, her confidence unwavering, and continued, “No need to fret. Downing a Sequence 8 potion directly won't trouble you. Plus, you've already digested the Assassin potion.”

Infected by her confidence, Jenna's expression gradually turned resolute.

Oh, you're employing Instigation, are you? Is this an upright approach for an Instigator? Lumian grasped Franca's intentions, yet he didn't call her out.

Jenna steeled herself and composed her mind. She picked up the double-handled broth bowl and lifted it to her lips.

Gazing at the obsidian potion fizzing with tiny bubbles, as though harboring hidden desires and ill intent, she tilted her head back and poured the contents from the porcelain bowl into her mouth.

An acute pain coursed from her mouth down to her esophagus, radiating to her brain and other parts of her body.

The pain jolted her awake, memories of the explosion at Goodville Chemical Factory flashing through her mind. She gained fresh insights, a better understanding of the true intentions and thoughts of those involved. She sensed malevolent thoughts that had either come to fruition or were waiting to be acted upon.

Soon, Jenna's heart was filled with rage, loathing, and a desire to obliterate those individuals and matters. She felt an urge to cease holding back and unleash her emotions.

Recalling Franca's repeated warnings, she resisted letting her hatred, anger, and desires take the reins. She clenched her fists, standing still.

Her shadow seemed to deepen, and her brownish-yellow hair appeared to lengthen.

In a little over ten seconds, the pain gradually receded, and Jenna reconnected with her body.

It's indeed quite easy... Most of the reason why I'm feeling half-dead after gulping down potions at a low Sequence is due to Inevitability's corruption... Lumian sighed.

Jenna swiftly gathered her thoughts and stretched her limbs, examining the changes in her body.

“Oh, my body's definitely gotten stronger. And I've got this new ability, Instigation...”

“It's actually pretty great. Instigation is more than just an ability. It lets me feel what others are feeling—emotions, desires, even malice. It sharpens my thinking and analytical skills. Ha, I'll have to use this to my advantage. Can't have Ciel always making fun of my smarts and performance...”

“Even if I don't speak, using Instigation actively will make me seem more reliable and approachable. It'll help folks around me think better of me.”

“With the Instigation ability and some clever talk, I can plant certain thoughts or desires in someone's mind, making them choose to act the way I want...”

After a quick adjustment, Jenna confirmed that her combat skills hadn't improved significantly, but she could be much more valuable in other situations.

“How'd it go? Told you there wouldn't be any trouble,” Franca said with a grin, her satisfaction not hidden at all.

Jenna's blue eyes still had traces of black threads in them. She let out a relieved breath and replied, “I was a bit worried earlier.”

“That's just the way it is at low Sequences. You'll need to be careful when you move up to Sequence 7,” Franca reminded Jenna, ensuring she didn't underestimate the risks of a potion.

Jenna nodded and said to Franca, “I owe you 30,000 verl d'or, including this time. I'll pay you back in installments.”

She included the Assassin potion from earlier.

Franca had discussed this with Jenna the night before. She had intended to treat it as a gift. After all, she could continue selling the potion formula and information about the Deep Valley Quarry. However, seeing Jenna's determination, she decided to accept it after some thought.

With a smile, she replied at that moment, “No need to rush. Take your time repaying. You could even stretch it into a 20 or 30-year loan.”

Lumian couldn't help but click his tongue and turned to Jenna. “Has the compensation from the Goodville Chemical Factory come through?”

“Imre and Valentine told me the legal process is done. Once the auction wraps up, the assets will be distributed—perhaps in two weeks.” Jenna didn't quite grasp why Lumian was suddenly bringing this up. “Julien and I should get around 6,000 verl d'or. We'll split it evenly after settling our debts. Honestly, I don't really want it, but he won't agree for sure.”

Lumian nodded and inquired further, “And what about your father's compensation?”

“Because of the Goodville Chemical Factory explosion, the court's given its final say, but the factory owner's dragging his feet. Ugh, is he trying to move his assets out before he pays up?” Jenna's tone carried a hint of anger as she spoke about it.

A chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

“How about this? We pay a visit to the families waiting for compensation soon. You ‘instigate’ them, and I'll ‘incite’ them. We alternate, gather them at the factory owner's place, and demand what's owed to them. It helps them and gives us a chance to digest the potion.”

“The factory owner's got a bunch of armed guards, and he's got ties to the police. What if they hurt the people just asking for their dues? They're already going through so much,” Jenna expressed her concern.

Lumian arched an eyebrow and replied, “The court has made its decision. They've got every right to seek their compensation. If anyone dares to fire shots, I promise they won't shoot again. Don't worry, with us around, they'll be safe. Besides, you can give the heads-up to the Purifiers. They'll understand.”

Jenna was convinced, her thoughts racing.

“Dammit, you're inciting me!”

While she grumbled, she accepted Lumian's idea and decided to gather information as soon as possible to figure out where the factory owner was now residing.

Simultaneously, another thought crossed her mind. “Now that I'm an Instigator, I need to interact with the trustee. It's a task from the Purifiers. Franca, when's the next meetup?”

Franca said indignantly, “Next weekend. Reaching out to the trustee is risky business. The Purifiers are kind of taking advantage of your lack of knowledge by only advancing you one ingredient for the Instigator potion. If it were me, I'd demand a better deal!”

Habitual instigation... Lumian chuckled inwardly.

As Franca and Jenna tidied up the coffee table, Lumian remained seated in an armchair, looking all repulsive.

After a while, Jenna approached him, her body lowering.

Lumian turned his head in surprise.

With a confident smirk, Jenna adjusted her hair.

“I can safely say that you didn't just show up to watch me drink that potion for dealing with Guillaume Bénet.”

Her grin was playful and teasing. Though she wasn't wearing makeup, it brought Lumian back to their first meeting when she was an underground singer at Salle de Bal Brise.

Before Lumian could respond, Jenna straightened up and strolled toward the bathroom, leaving behind a casual question.

“Is it really so hard to admit that we're friends and you care about your friends?”

On his way back to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian mulled over his role as Pyromaniac.

He was teetering on the edge of taking the first step towards digesting the potion; his hunger for more acting chances was insatiable.

Though I must set aflame minds and society, I cannot overlook the elemental act of kindling substances and fulfilling fire's symbolic essence.

Who would be a suitable candidate for burning...

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian's gaze spotted Baron Brignais.

The mob leader, who usually emulated Gehrman Sparrow, had discarded his customary poise and genteel demeanor. Instead, he marched restlessly and agitatedly along Avenue du Marché, his eyes darting around incessantly.

Lumian fixated on him briefly, though Baron Brignais remained oblivious.

Baffled, he retraced his steps to Salle de Bal Brise and inquired of Sarkota, who had once served under Baron Brignais, “Do you have any knowledge of what happened to Brignais? I observed him in a state of great unease just now.”

The reticent Sarkota glanced towards the café's glass window and replied, “Baron Brignais's illegitimate son has gone missing.”

Illegitimate son? Gone missing? Lumian's thoughts immediately turned to the young lad Baron Brignais had picked up from the Suhit steam locomotive station.

## Chapter 310 Encounter

“How did he go missing?” Lumian asked, puzzled.

Baron Brignais wasn't just a mob leader; he was a Beyonder, too. As long as he was attentive, how could he allow his child to disappear?

Moreover, who in the market district would dare to snatch his child?

...

Sarkota shook his head. “He didn't provide details.”

Could it be the machinations of the Rose School of Thought, striving to expose the truth about the Savoie Mob from Baron Brignais? With recent events woven into the mix, Lumian had some unconfirmed theories.

After a brief pause of thought, he inquired, “Do you know what Brignais's illegitimate son looks like?”

Sarkota nodded. “The baron's underlings came by with a portrait that resembles a photograph.”

A portrait that resembles a photograph... Had he invoked ritualistic magic? Lumian's memory recalled the contents of Aurore's grimoires.

Gazing at the brilliant sunlight streaming through the window, he turned to Sarkota.

“Gather some men and aid Brignais.”

Regardless of whether the child was ensnared by the Rose School of Thought or had truly gone missing, if they couldn't locate him soon, the outcome would be grim.

At his age, even without additional complications, his fate as a street urchin wouldn't be kind.

“Understood.” Sarkota refrained from inquiring why his boss had decided to lend a hand to Baron Brignais.

After all, it wasn't yet noon, and Salle de Bal Brise had just commenced operations. The real hustle and bustle didn't kick in until three or four in the afternoon. Apart from the janitors and kitchen staff, most folks had time aplenty.

Lumian ordered a glass of ice water topped with sugar-infused alcohol and stood on the café's balcony, observing the mobsters interrogating vagrants along Avenue du Marché.

After a while, “Rat” Christo appeared. The diminutive smuggling chief emerged from an alley, trailed by seven or eight dogs of varying hues and breeds, and entered the diagonally opposite alley.

Before long, he drew nearer to Salle de Bal Brise.

At this sight, Lumian finished the remaining alcohol, placed the glass on the railing, and leaped from the second floor to the street.

Christo, his two rat-like whiskers wiggling, approached with a sycophantic grin.

“Good morning, Ciel.”

“Are you aiding Brignais in locating his illegitimate son?” Lumian inquired directly.

Christo nodded gently. “Indeed. He personally reached out to me for assistance. Coincidentally, these kids excel at tracking down people.”

As the “Rat” spoke, he affectionately patted the dogs' heads.

They alternated between gathering and dispersing, following a distinct scent.

Baron Brignais truly cares for that illegitimate son... Lumian advised “Rat” Christo with a pensive air, “There might be something peculiar about this situation. Stay vigilant. I don't want you to go missing before finding the boy.”

The Rose School of Thought being responsible for abducting the boy was always one of the possibilities.

Christo was taken aback, pondered for a moment, and remarked, “There's indeed something amiss. In recent years, we've never heard of Brignais having such a son. Moreover, he holds him in high regard. Why would the boy vanish?”

A sudden appearance of an illegitimate child? Lumian's intuition suggested this might be more intricate than he presumed.

After contemplating briefly, Christo gratefully said, “Ciel, your intellect surpasses mine.”

“Don't you possess medicine to enhance your mind?” Lumian inquired, half jesting and half curious.

As Christo allowed the dogs to nuzzle his trousers, he sheepishly smiled and replied, “Indeed, but they're short-term solutions. Their effects are middling, nowhere near the potency of a potion. Damn it, excessive consumption can lead to complications.”

Lumian shifted the conversation, asking, “Do you possess authentic mummy ashes?”

Christo assumed an enigmatic expression.

“How much do you require? I can provide you with the best version. That 'Little Minx' Jenna often frequents Franca. She's a tricky one. Just days ago, Franca inquired if I had genuine mummy ashes. Tsk, even the Boss is having trouble.”

Ciel also had numerous dancers and actresses as mistresses. Despite his youth, he still relied on medicine.

“I mean true mummy ashes.” Lumian stroked his chin.

“I don't.” Christo shook his head. “That stuff is ineffective, and I don't know who propagated the falsehood, but I do have a concoction that can satisfy all your paramours. It's composed of various herbs; I merely claim mummy ashes as the primary ingredient.”

“Did Franca buy it?” Lumian inquired with a grin.

“She did.” Christo cooperatively chuckled. “Probably because the Boss is too embarrassed to approach me.”

Her facade was impeccable. She concealed her true desires from the “Rat,” seeking the so-called “ineffective” mummy ashes... Lumian sighed and confessed openly, “I need genuine mummy ashes. They possess mystical uses. Keep an eye out since you often engage with merchants trading in alchemical materials.”

“No problem.” Christo suspected that Ciel aimed to preserve his dignity and wouldn't acknowledge his quest for such a remedy. He insisted on mysticism as a pretext for seeking mummy ashes but didn't expose him. After all, it was a minor matter.

Observing Christo's persistent search for Baron Brignais's missing illegitimate son with his dogs, Lumian turned on his heel and made his way back to the dance hall.

As he was about to approach the bar counter, Termiboros's commanding voice reverberated in his ears: “To the cellar.”

To the cellar... Lumian's initial thought was that the Inevitability angel had something planned.

“Which cellar?” he inquired.

“The one used to store ingredients,” replied Termiboros.

So proactive, so eager... What's He plotting? Lumian began to wonder if there was an underlying scheme at play.

Termiboros continued, "It's a stroke of fate for you. Even if you don't go, it will find its way to you. It's destined."

You're giving me chills... Termiboros won't likely put me in immediate danger right now... What could be in that cellar... Lumian contemplated briefly and reckoned that the ingredient storage cellar was usually bustling around noon. In theory, there shouldn't be anything unusual or perilous.

After careful consideration, he decided to head to the cellar, listen at the door, and take a look. If he sensed anything awry, he would write to Madam Magician and inquire if he should heed Termiboros's advice and enter.

Amidst the greetings of the chefs, kitchen helpers, handymen, and dishwashing maids, Lumian crossed through the kitchen and descended the stairs to the ingredient storage cellar.

The cellar's dark-brown wooden door was securely shut, as usual.

Lumian strained his ears, intently listening for any signs of activity.

A faint chewing sound reached his ears.

It wasn't a dramatic sound, devoid of the horrifying notion of a creature devouring flesh. Rather, it resembled a tramp gnawing on food after a long bout of hunger.

Something's definitely amiss... Lumian cautiously pushed open the cellar door.

The light from the stairs seeped in, revealing a figure.

It was a boy of seven or eight, his back to Lumian. He had short yellow hair, a caramel coat, white stockings, and black strapless leather shoes. Behind him lay a dark red school bag that seemed somewhat weighty and sturdy.

Lumian found the attire oddly familiar.

Suddenly, he recalled where he'd seen it before.

Baron Brignais's illegitimate son!

So, his disappearance led him to hiding in the ingredient cellar of Salle de Bal Brise? Lumian had intended to take a quick glance before shutting the door and leaving to pen a letter to Madam Magician at Auberge du Coq Doré. Yet, upon realizing that the person in the cellar was likely Baron Brignais's illegitimate son, he furrowed his brow slightly and swung open the dark brown wooden door a bit more.

Additional light streamed in, causing the boy to instinctively turn and face the door.

Lumian caught sight of the brass buttons on his clothes, a black-and-white checkered shirt, and a linen coat. He saw a face with evident baby fat, unperturbed but vacant brown eyes, and a mouth smeared with blood.

The boy clutched a few raw steaks tinged with a dark red hue in his hand. His mouth kept opening and closing as he chewed on a vague mass of flesh resembling a rat. Its thin black tail gently swayed near his lips.

Lumian narrowed his eyes and slipped his left hand into his pocket.

The boy remained unperturbed, his gaze vacant as he continued staring at Lumian. He chewed a few more times before swallowing the bloody rat, tail and all.

Lumian arched an eyebrow and asked, "Are you Brignais's illegitimate son?"

"No," the boy mumbled, nibbling at a piece of raw steak.

"Then what's your connection?" Lumian queried in a "peaceful" manner.

After a while of eating raw steak, the boy answered, "He's my godfather and guardian in Trier."

Remarkably precise Intisian, hardly any accent... Lumian regarded the peculiar boy with puzzlement and probed, "Are you running away from home?"

"Yes," the boy replied, blood staining his mouth as he continued nibbling on the raw steak.

Behind him stretched a thick darkness, enveloped by the dim light from the corridor.

"Why did you flee from your godfather? Do you need me to help you return?" Lumian asked, offering a friendly smile, noticing that the other party was more amicable in conversation.

The boy shook his head vigorously.

"No! I don't want to go back to attending classes, studying, doing homework, taking practice tests, and sitting for exams!"

Wh— The boy's reasoning left Lumian oddly bewildered, as if he had glimpsed his own past.

He was intelligent and had no trouble attending classes, reading, or taking exams. He absorbed knowledge swiftly, but he disliked homework or practice tests. He relied on Aurore's "heartfelt education" to barely persevere. He often wished he could rope in Reimund, Ava, and his friends to do those tasks for him.

Is this rat-chewing enigma the fateful encounter Termiboros alluded to? Lumian pondered and inquired, "You don't seem to be from Intis?"

With an honest demeanor and a bloodied mouth, the boy responded, "I'm from Lenburg."