

Inevitability 371

Chapter 371 Wax Statue

A figure emerged slowly from the blood-stained river.

Lumian's mind seemed to freeze momentarily for some inexplicable reason as he observed the figure crawling ashore. Instead of an immediate attack, he watched the figure climb out of the water.

The unfamiliar man's face bore an eerie stiffness, and his clothes clung to him from being soaked in water. The latter seemed to merge with his flesh.

...

It was a wax statue, a wax statue that came to life!

Crimson blood seeped from the waxen figure, mixing with the river's flow before smashing against the wild grass along the bank.

The wax statue's light-blue eyes shifted slightly within their white sockets, casting a vague reflection of Lumian.

Meeting that gaze left Lumian feeling overwhelmed, unable to resist mentally or physically. Instinctual fear surged within him, drowning out all other emotions.

Suddenly, Lumian's survival instincts kicked in, fully erupting and overpowering all other emotions and states.

Lumian's vision was restored.

The wax statue, with its cold, unyielding eyes, was now less than a meter away. Its pale-white hand, dripping with blood, extended its fingers like deadly blades, thrusting toward him.

Lumian had no time to react. He raised his right palm to shield his face, and there was a resounding impact as the wax statue's razor-sharp finger collided with his iron-black Flog boxing glove, adorned with short thorns.

Where the boxing glove fell short, the wax statue's finger pierced Lumian's palm, leaving a conspicuous wound on his face.

Had he not shaken off the initial intimidation, the blow might have punctured his skull and reached his brain.

The familiar searing pain jolted Lumian awake. Clenching his left hand, he conjured a blazing crimson flame and launched a powerful punch at the wax statue's face from the side.

Simultaneously, with a smile, he tightened his right palm, using his own flesh and blood to hinder the wax statue's right hand, preventing it from evading his fiery strike.

Bang!

The Flog boxing gloves knocked the wax statue's head askew, and the iron-black thorns on their surface etched exaggerated scratches onto its unyielding face, the wounds shifting from deep to superficial.

Despite the vivid flow of bright red blood, there was no flesh-like texture to the injuries, only layers of wax that seemed to melt under an invisible fire.

In response, blood-colored capillaries extended from the wax statue's light-blue eyes, exuding an intense, bloodthirsty desire that lent it an eerie vitality, making it resemble the living.

Lumian had chosen the Flog boxing gloves for its potency, a mystical weapon of utmost power, especially against the creature that Termiboros had labeled as dangerous. He couldn't afford to be careless. However, he never expected his enemy to be a wax statue rather than a living being.

It rendered the Flog's ability to evoke specific desires or emotions ineffective; it could only serve as a defensive tool.

If not for the bizarre intimidation, Lumian would have discarded his boxing gloves and opted for the Decency brooch. Now, with his adversary before him, he had no choice but to stick with the Flog gloves, focusing instead on Fire Infusion.

To his astonishment, his punch had ignited the wax statue's bloodlust, suggesting that the entity retained a degree of life, along with faint emotions and desires of its own.

“Good to see you're still kicking!” Lumian's grin widened.

He pulled back his right palm, gritting his teeth through the pain, and his fiery fist realigned the wax statue's head.

The wax statue, its bloodthirsty desires now heightened, showed no inclination to increase the distance between them. It resumed its intimidating tactics, instinctively and desperately engaging in close combat with Lumian.

This played perfectly into Lumian's strategy. His iron-black boxing gloves, ablaze with crimson flames, consistently clashed with the wax statue's limbs, fists, shoulders, torso, and head in rapid, precise succession.

Each punch lacked brute force; what Lumian needed was a relentless onslaught.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bang! Bang! Bang! Lumian's fists, adorned with the Flog gloves, trailed crimson flames, effectively suppressing the agile and skilled wax statue to the point where it couldn't employ any other abilities.

His feet executed a fluid dance of stepping forward and raising knees to fend off the attacks from below.

Within a mere ten to twenty seconds, the wax statue abruptly ceased its movements, and an ethereal explosion emanated from its form.

The capillaries within its eyes ruptured, staining the once light-blue hue a vivid crimson. Cracks crisscrossed its head, connecting with the injuries inflicted by the Flog gloves.

Desire Detonation!

Lumian's relentless assault had triggered the Desire Detonation effect of the Flog boxing gloves.

In response, Lumian withdrew his fists and watched in silence as the wax statue's blood-red eyes revealed signs of pain.

Two crimson teardrops slowly welled up at the corners of its eyes, streaming down its waxy cheeks.

The wax statue opened its mouth as if attempting to speak, yet no sound escaped.

Rumble!

A muffled explosion emanated from within its body, and the exaggerated wounds extended across its form.

Crimson flames erupted from these regions, engulfing the wax statue entirely.

Fire Infusion!

Amidst the fierce inferno, the wax statue rapidly softened, its body dripping with blood-stained, viscous droplets.

Thud!

It collapsed to the ground.

What kind of monster is this? Lumian gazed at the fallen creature for more than ten seconds, his Hunter's instincts telling him that this prey couldn't possess Beyonder characteristics.

During this moment, he retrieved his briefcase and carefully stowed away the Flog boxing gloves.

Without hesitation, Lumian turned and exited the forest.

Behind him, crimson flames surged, consuming his dripping blood.

Within the blazing inferno, the wax statue had melted beyond recognition. Lumian's figure gradually faded, disappearing not far from the scene.

Spirit world traversal!

To evade the attention of evil gods and the dangerous entities summoned by the Flog boxing gloves, Lumian shifted his position, effectively "teleporting" to a nearby town.

It was a location he had scouted in advance, with precise coordinates within the spirit world.

After several dozen seconds, the forest path was suddenly replaced by a desolate wilderness, with only a few flickering flames remaining.

The weeds gradually flourished, and the figure of a person in a white robe materialized swiftly.

This figure donned a light-colored veil, and her abdomen was notably swollen. An unmistakable maternal aura enveloped her form. It was Lady Moon of the Nightstalkers.

Lady Moon directed her gaze towards the entirely melted, blood-stained wax statue, silently observing the dance of crimson flames.

After more than ten seconds of contemplation, the woman and the desolate wilderness vanished.

In a room within the main building of Red Swan Castle, Count Poufer, clad in a red shirt and sleek black trousers, occupied a cluttered desk. His icy stare remained fixed upon the wax statue's head placed before him.

The head bore an uncanny resemblance to a living being, with light-blue eyes and jet-black hair.

As the silence lingered, Count Poufer couldn't conceal a hint of restlessness. Occasionally, he tugged at his collar, shifted in his chair, and even unbuttoned the top of his shirt, as if the air had grown unnaturally thin, impeding his breathing.

As time ticked by, the wax statue's head suddenly emitted an ominous cracking sound.

It shattered into numerous pieces, each one grotesquely melted.

Poufer shot to his feet in shock, his pupils dilating in disbelief.

Tiny blood vessels protruded from his eyes, ruptured, and dyed them a vivid shade of red.

It was killed? Poufer murmured to himself, his astonishment mingling with suspicion.

Ciel Dubois was even more mysterious and formidable than he had initially thought!

Even if he wasn't, the hidden faction operating behind him was!

Count Poufer paced back and forth with a solemn expression.

After Lumian “teleported” to the town ahead, he exercised caution, remaining concealed in the shadows while meticulously calculating the time.

Only when he felt that a Hunter could potentially reach his location from the forest by running did he cautiously make his way into the town. He located the carriage driver and arranged for his return to 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

In a room adorned with bookshelves, Lumian fixed his gaze upon Gardner Martin, who held a cigar in his hand. Lumian spoke frankly, “I was attacked.”

There was no way to hide the truth from the Boss.

“Huh?” Gardner Martin responded in his distinctive nasal tone.

Lumian proceeded to recount the events, detailing how he had chosen the King's Pie slice after Count Poufer and subsequently felt a frenzied spirit attempting to invade him. He described how he had utilized Fire Infusion to dismantle and melt the wax statue, displaying the wounds on his hands and face.

What Lumian chose not to reveal was that he had discerned why the frenzied consciousness hadn't fully occupied his body and that he had used the Flog boxing gloves. He attributed the former to an unknown cause.

Gardner Martin smoked his cigar, listening quietly, unsurprised that Lumian's mind had remained incorrupt.

Had he displayed any hint of astonishment or suspicion, Lumian would have swiftly “invited” Mr. K to eliminate the Iron and Blood Cross Order's stronghold.

With a cigar in hand, Gardner Martin smiled and remarked, “It appears that the official members of our Iron and Blood Cross Order are more favored by Poufer's ancestor's spirit than Poufer himself. However, we also instill fear in it.”

Does this refer to Beyonders who have succumbed to the peculiar corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché? The frenzied consciousness won't invade the other formal members of the Iron and Blood

Cross Order, even in the absence of the Blood Emperor's aura? I wonder how true this is. Why don't you give it a try, Boss? Lumian suddenly felt the urge to goad Gardner Martin into playing King's Pie with Count Poufer.

“Now, I've confirmed something,” Gardner Martin's expression grew serious. “The ancestor of the Sauron family, Vermonda Sauron, is not truly deceased. He exists in a manner beyond our current comprehension.”

Chapter 372 Primary Mission

Lumian couldn't quite understand how Gardner Martin could be so certain that Vermonda Sauron wasn't dead. Still, it seemed that the other party didn't intend to explain, so he could only give up on asking.

He was concerned about one thing:

“Does that mean my mission is over?”

Clearly, combined with Count Poufer's fondness for creating wax statue heads for friends he knew and the fact that a wax statue had attacked him, Lumian believed that he was now under suspicion by the other party. It would be very dangerous to interact with him again.

Gardner Martin shook his head slowly.

“No, you have to continue.”

Holding the cigar, he stood up and paced towards the floor-to-ceiling windows.

“The fact that you became the king after Poufer will undoubtedly make him suspicious of your origins, but he will be more eager to find out the real reason for that incident. The subsequent wax statue attack was mainly attributed to this.

“Therefore, he will still invite you over to test you in different ways and extract your hidden secrets. For us, this is an opportunity to confirm the true state of Vermonda and the Sauron family's ancestors.

“And through this, we can grasp the reason for the gradual decline of this once exceptionally powerful family. This is of great significance to us, who are also mainly from the Hunter pathway. It is our primary mission now.

“To put it simply, the Sauron family is like Red Swan Castle. They've been in disrepair for a long time, but they hide many secrets. They have guards that can deter spying. What we need to do is figure out the castle's defense flaws and confirm if those secrets pose a fatal threat to us. Then, we can find an opportunity to break through the guards, bypass the traps, and take the treasure.

“Don't worry, I'll covertly provide protection for Poufer's future invitations. The risk you'll take won't be significant.”

Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Commanding Officer, you mentioned before that our primary mission is to find the true entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier."

How could the primary mission change so easily?

Gardner Martin took a puff of his cigar and smiled.

"These two matters are connected to a certain extent and serve the same purpose, but you don't need to know for the time being."

What's their motive? In other words, the Iron and Blood Cross Order's current focus is on exploring the underground, finding the entrance to the Fourth Epoch Trier, investigating the Sauron family's decline over the past 200 to 300 years, and securing something precious from them? According to Mr. K, one reason for the Sauron family's decline is their descent into madness and the loss of many important members over time. Gardner Martin and I are mainly responsible for the Sauron family aspect. Are the other members, including Supervisor Olson, exploring the underground? Lumian had a clearer understanding of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's recent plans.

This was also his primary mission.

Of course, he only knew what to do and didn't understand why.

"Yes, Commanding Officer," Lumian agreed without further ado.

He had a hunch that this would be an opportunity for him to digest the Pyromaniac potion and advance further on the Hunter pathway.

According to Madam Magician, the Sauron family was once a powerful faction with a Hunter angel.

Gardner Martin didn't inquire about how much gold Poufer had offered to the "king," hinting that Lumian could leave and await the Count's future invitation.

Passing through the renovated hall, Lumian spotted Faustino, the butler, who was also an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, leading a black-cloaked figure in.

The man was of average height, barely 1.75 meters tall. His attire was loose, and he was tightly wrapped, obscuring his exact appearance and physique.

Lumian could only determine that it was a man based on his walking posture, height, and strides.

Faustino nodded at Lumian as a greeting before leading the mysterious man through the hall and into Gardner Martin's study.

Who could it be? What brings him here so late at night for a discussion? Lumian averted his gaze, his thoughts racing as he left 11 Rue des Fontaines.

In the market district, Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian suddenly gave weight to his pace, producing thumping sounds.

He leisurely returned to Room 207, ignited the carbide lamp, turned around in the armchair, and sat down. He smiled at the unlatched door.

After 20 to 30 seconds, soft footsteps echoed from Room 201.

The footsteps hesitated before showing determination. Soon, they arrived outside Room 207 and gently knocked on the door.

“Please come in,” Lumian said, raising his chin slightly.

As expected, it was Laurent. He wore a linen shirt and black pants, completely different from whenever he headed out.

After closing the door, Laurent looked at Lumian and said, “Monsieur Dubois, I wish to borrow 500 verl d'or from you.”

Lumian was taken aback, not expecting this development.

He thought the man was here to plead with him not to expose his true identity.

Unexpectedly, he came to borrow money!

“Why 500 verl d'or?” Lumian's expression remained unchanged.

Laurent's voice deepened as he said, “I'm about to become one of the deputy editors-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien. Although I'll be the most junior-ranking editor, I can't continue living here. I have to invite my colleagues to gatherings at home regularly to build a good relationship with them.

“Therefore, I wish to borrow 500 verl d'or to rent a good apartment in Quartier de l'Observatoire or Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. I want to bring my mother there and use the time to teach her how to host a small banquet.

“Once I receive my salary, I'll repay the debt in installments. How much do you think the interest rate should be?”

This is not only borrowing money to secure his job, but also taking the initiative to give me leverage and some benefits so that I won't ruin his plans... Lumian thought a little higher of Laurent and nodded thoughtfully.

“I don't need interest. You'll definitely come into contact with some interesting news, information, and advertisements at Le Petit Trierien. I hope you can organize them regularly and give me a copy.”

As Lumian spoke, he took out his wallet and counted five banknotes worth 100 verl d'or.

“Just pay it back this year.”

Laurent heaved a sigh of relief and said, “No problem.”

After watching the speculator write the IOU and leave Room 207, Lumian took out the five heavy gold bars from Count Poufer's pocket and tossed them in his hand.

With this unexpected windfall, he had amassed 75,000 verl d'or worth of gold. At the same time, he had 2,000 verl d'or that hadn't been exchanged for gold and the remaining 4,000 verl d'or funds for his activities.

It won't be long before I complete the Armored Shadow's contract and summon it again... Lumian fiddled with the gold bars for a while before leaving the briefcase containing the Flog boxing gloves on the armchair. He washed up and went to bed, awaiting the inevitable nightmare.

In his daze, Lumian once again caught sight of Red Swan Castle, its beige outer walls stained with aged blood.

In a daze, he walked in and arrived at the large living room where he had played King's Pie.

Miss Elros, Painter Mullen, Le Petit Trierien's editor-in-chief, Cornell, and the other guests who often attended Count Poufer's banquet sat on the sofa, as if awaiting Lumian's arrival.

Laurent and the other guests' temporary female companions were absent.

This made the scene seem like another salon or a past one.

As Lumian approached the sofa, Count Poufer and the others stood up and greeted him respectfully.

“Good afternoon, Your Royal Majesty,” they greeted in unison.

Instinctively, Lumian glanced at them coldly.

“Oh?”

Count Poufer and the others were taken aback for a moment.

“Your Imperial Majesty!”

Lumian nodded slightly and settled into an armchair, watching as the guests settled around him.

They chatted nonchalantly, their topics diverse and vague.

Suddenly, Novelist Anori raised his right hand and scratched his face.

With a tearing sound, he ripped off a large piece of skin, revealing squirming flesh and blackened tubes.

Almost simultaneously, Painter Mullen and the others either stabbed themselves in the heart or tore at their companions' necks.

In an instant, the entire living room turned abnormally bloody, and there was a terrifying scene everywhere.

Lumian's thoughts raced as his vision underwent an immediate transformation.

In another hall of the castle, surrounded by countless lit white candles was a coffin.

The coffin was made of bronze and its surface was rusted. It was unknown how long it had been there.

Lumian's heart swelled with sorrow and helplessness, as if he had lost his kin and support. He slowly extended his right hand, attempting to caress the rusty bronze coffin.

At that moment, the coffin's lid creaked open, revealing a deep crack.

Suddenly, a palm with dark-red, nearly-black blood vessels extended, holding an extremely withered heart with some blood seeping out.

The heart was still gently and indiscernibly contracting and expanding.

Upon seeing the withered heart, Lumian's thoughts raced chaotically, tainted with a certain madness.

His right palm felt slightly warm, and he suddenly woke up from his dream.

He wasn't surprised or flustered by the nightmare. As he calmed his racing heart, he recalled the details of the nightmare.

Gradually, Lumian frowned.

In the first scene, most of the King's Pie game participants eventually went crazy. They either mutilated themselves or others, but there were three exceptions. Even when the scene changed, they were still normal.

One was Lumian himself, and the other was Count Poufer.

There was another one Lumian hadn't expected: Miss Elros!

She's not as reserved and obedient as she appears. She has her own secrets... Lumian smiled silently.

As for what the bronze coffin, dead body, and withered heart represented in the second scene, he couldn't decipher them at all. He could only guess that it might be related to the Sauron family's secret.

Just like the last time, Lumian had several nightmares that night, but the clarity and completeness of his dreams gradually decreased.

Just before dawn, the nightmare was completely gone.

After waking up, Lumian quickly wrote a letter and sent it to Madam Magician while his memories still remained fresh.

Chapter 373 Summoning the Armored Shadow Again

After fifteen minutes, Madam Magician replied with a brief letter:

“The Iron and Blood Cross Order's investigation into the Sauron family's decline contradicts my previous speculations. It seems that what they claim to have may not align with their actual possessions. Perhaps they possess only critical information that allows them to achieve their goals under specific conditions. One of these conditions is unavoidable for the Sauron family.”

Lumian's temples throbbed at Madam Magician's response. She had conveyed a lot, but the crucial details remained elusive. While he understood each word individually, their combined meaning eluded him.

What does the Iron and Blood Cross Order actually possess and what does it claim?

Lumian massaged his temples and continued reading.

“This situation presents both danger and opportunity for you. Investigating the truth behind the Sauron family's downfall is a mission I eagerly anticipate. Mr. Fool assigned this long-term mission to our Tarot Club, much like the Two of Cups

interacting with the Demoness Sect to confirm the Primordial Demoness's condition. There's no need to rush. Take your time. Even if it takes years to complete.”

“...” Lumian was taken aback.

He had expected Franca's Major Arcana, Madam Judgment, to agree to her contact with the Demoness Sect. But what kind of terrifying mission was it to ascertain the Primordial Demoness's condition?

That was a true deity!

Based on Lumian's recent knowledge from various sources, not only was direct observation of deities impossible, but attempting to understand Their specific situation was exceedingly perilous.

As for the evil gods like the one known as Inevitability, mere awareness of Their existence equated to corruption.

A long-term mission... a task that could only be completed once Franca achieved demigod status? Lumian thoughtfully read the last sentence of Madam Magician's reply.

“Focus on this matter. If you need help or find yourself in a bind, contact me in advance. As for the Aurora Order, refrain from participating in other missions. Concentrate on the Iron and Blood Cross Order. I believe Mr. K will understand.”

Madam Magician had previously tasked me with infiltrating the Aurora Order and slowly gaining Mr. K's trust, with the ultimate goal of becoming an Oracle. However, it is apparent from her tone that priorities had shifted. Now, she emphasizes giving precedence to the Iron and Blood Cross Order... Lumian discerned this as a significant signal from her reply.

Crimson flames erupted as Lumian burned the letter in his hand. He slung a satchel over his shoulder and placed the Flog boxing gloves inside. Then, he made his way to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

He located a random café and had breakfast there.

It wasn't until nearly nine o'clock that Lumian knocked on the door of Apartment 601.

Franca didn't express any annoyance at being awakened this time. She didn't appear to be asleep, wearing a troubled expression instead.

Upon seeing Lumian, she tugged at her flaxen-colored hair, which was left untied, and said, “Guess what? I've accepted a suicide mission!”

“Confirming the Primordial Demoness's condition?” Lumian chuckled.

Sensing that Franca had done so willingly, he no longer fretted about her.

“How did you know?” Franca asked, surprised.

“Do you want to hear the truth or a lie? For the lie, I divined it. The truth is, I just reported the recent situation to my Major Arcana card holder, and she mentioned your choice.” Lumian strolled over to the divan and sat down casually. “Where's Jenna?”

Realization dawned on Franca as she casually said, “To Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. “Ever since she received her father's compensation, she's been keen on instigation. Yesterday, she poached a supporting actress whose contract had expired and convinced her to switch to a theater in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. While it did boost her income significantly, I could have matched the offer if I had been informed. Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons has been quite profitable lately.”

Franca didn't hold a grudge against Jenna because Jenna had sought her opinion beforehand and obtained her approval. She believed such instigations were beneficial. Plus, having a supporting actress leave opened up opportunities for apprentices like Jenna and the former dancers.

After recounting the matter briefly, Franca sighed and continued, “Madam Judgment only wants me to interact with the Demoness Sect. Under the condition that I control my desires and mental state, I can use their resources to enhance myself, monitor their activities, and understand their immediate plans. Confirming the Primordial Demoness's condition can be considered once I truly attain godhood and become a saint. I can deduce certain situations through the Demoness Sect's activities, their recent plans, and the reactions during prayers to the Primordial Demoness.”

“Aren't you troubled by the mission?” Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Franca sighed.

“I am troubled by the mission, but what's troubling is that I'll remain a Demoness at Sequence 4. I won't be able to transform back into a man.”

“You can wait until Sequence 3,” Lumian suggested with a relaxed demeanor.

“That's true, although it would be even more challenging.” Franca had thought it through and then asked why Lumian had suddenly reported the situation to Madam Magician.

Lumian briefly recounted his experience at Red Swan Castle from yesterday and Gardner Martin's words, omitting specific details.

Franca listened intently, contemplating for a moment before saying, “Our current missions combined involve the secrets and movements of the relevant factions within the Hunter and Demoness pathways.

“The Tarot Club appears to attach great importance to such matters...”

Lumian chuckled.

“That's the only way we'll have a chance.”

Franca acknowledged his words tersely and suddenly remembered something.

“How much gold did you command Count Poufer to give you?”

“30,000,” Lumian replied honestly.

Franca's eyes lit up.

“How much gold do you have now?”

“75,000. I can add another 6,000 at any time,” Lumian disclosed without hesitation.

Franca's smile widened.

“Then I'll lend you 25,000 first, interest-free!

“Let's summon the Armored Shadow tonight and try to figure things out before the gathering next week.”

“You have 25,000 verl d'or?” Lumian was mildly surprised.

He recalled that Franca had spent all her savings to advance to the Demoness of Pleasure.

Franca said smugly, “I received 20,000 verl d'or for assisting you in dealing with Guillaume Bénet, and Gardner Martin has been quite generous lately. He entrusted me with managing most of the earnings from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and the dancers. Heh heh, Madam Judgment even provided me with 10,000 to support my activities.”

Your earnings are quite impressive as well... Lumian realized that while the profits from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and the dancers might not match those of Salle de Bal Brise, they were undoubtedly substantial. If Franca could claim a significant portion of them, she could easily make around 20,000 per month.

He nodded and said, “Alright, we'll perform the summoning ritual at 11 tonight at the same place the other time.”

Franca's joy was palpable.

“I'll arrange for someone to exchange the 25,000 gold right away.”

Late at night, at Rist Docks, within the charred remains of a building.

Franca observed Lumian as he set up the altar and placed all the gold upon it.

Rather than staying outside the wall of spirituality, she chose to remain by her companion's side.

Lumian proceeded to light the candles one by one, letting the essential oil drip. Stepping back, he intoned, “The Fool that doesn't belong to this era;

“...”

Almost simultaneously, Franca chanted Mr. Fool's honorific name, ensuring her safety in the presence of the ritual's power.

Soon, amid the faint fog and a sense of impending danger, Lumian recited the final part of the incantation.

“I!

“In the name of the great Fool, I summon:

“The spirit that wanders the void, a combination of numerous shadows, Lumian Lee's contracted creature.”

Within the wavering candlelight, an ethereal door adorned with enigmatic symbols materialized. From it emerged a shadowy figure clad in dark armor reminiscent of fish scales.

Just as before, each scale seemed to bear a face, each belonging to a different creature.

Those are indeed fish scales... Franca couldn't tear her gaze away, her anticipation and anxiety overriding the eerie ambiance that surrounded them and the evident malevolence emanating from the Armored Shadow.

Lumian locked eyes with the Armored Shadow and spoke in Hermes, “I will fulfill the contract and offer you gold valued at 100,000 verl d'or.”

To be honest, Lumian harbored some doubts about the 100,000 verl d'or worth of gold. The ever-changing exchange rates between verl d'or and gold left him uncertain whether he should prepare the amount based on the exchange rate at the time of signing the contract or the current rate. As a precaution, he had only acquired an additional 1,000 verl d'or worth of gold as a backup.

As Lumian finished his words, the gold bars, jewelry, and various items on the altar suddenly disintegrated, transforming into golden particles that flew toward the mysterious illusory door.

Most of these particles landed on the Armored Shadow, while a few passed through the open illusory door and disappeared.

Gradually, almost a fifth of the Armored Shadow's pitch-black armor, resembling fish scales, transformed into gold. It was no longer dark and foreboding but radiated a holy and pristine aura.

Franca's eyes widened.

Legends and terms from her original world rushed into her mind as she muttered to herself, “Could this be... the reconstruction of the golden body?”

In her memory, the golden body referred to the golden powder or gold foil applied to the surface of idol statues. Sometimes, it denoted the special form of someone with godlike status or significant achievements. The Armored Shadow now resembled a weathered statue that had been rejuvenated with a coating of golden powder.

When all the gold on the altar had vanished, Lumian sensed that the contract had been completely fulfilled.

Taking the opportunity, he asked on Franca's behalf in Hermes, “Where do you come from?”

The Armored Shadow opened its mouth and spoke with a deep, dignified, and somewhat sinister voice.

However, Lumian couldn't comprehend its words at all. He could only watch in confusion as the Armored Shadow returned to the illusory door.

Once the summoning ritual concluded, Lumian turned to Franca and noticed that her companion seemed lost in thought, her brows furrowed.

His heart stirred as he asked, “Did you understand the Armored Shadow's response?”

Franca nodded slowly.

“The language he used is very similar to the language from my home world.

“He said...”

Franca paused and muttered to herself, puzzlement evident on her face, “The Blood Son of Heaven disrupted the netherworld, and the Underworld Daoist sacrificed himself to enter the river.”

Chapter 374 Preliminary Speculation

Despite Franca speaking Intisian, it left Lumian perplexed. He struggled to grasp her meaning or intentions.

Surveying the silent ruins around him, he found nothing out of the ordinary. Turning his attention back to Franca, he inquired, “Care to explain?”

Franca contemplated for a moment before responding, “The Son of Heaven is roughly equivalent to an Emperor. As for Daoist, eh—think of it as a mighty Beyonder.”

“In essence, this Emperor, bearing the title ‘Blood,’ wrought havoc in hell, sowing chaos. As for the Daoist known as ‘Underworld,’ a powerful Beyonder, they made the ultimate sacrifice, entering a certain river to seal away this Emperor.”

The Emperor with the title of Blood... Lumian was alarmed.

“The Blood Emperor?”

Memories from the Samaritan Women's Spring came flooding back.

In those vivid recollections, the Blood Emperor's elusive figure burned with concealed flames, his battered armor soaked in blood. The dark waters receded within the fountain only to surge forth again, merging with the ethereal mist, transforming into a pale spring. Alista Tudor's apparition was tugged back into the fountain's depths by an inexplicable force. It appeared as though a fierce battle had transpired between the two entities...

With Franca's explanation, Lumian's mind began to piece together a new interpretation of the Armored Shadow's cryptic words and his encounter.

He said thoughtfully to Franca, “I suspect the ‘Blood Son of Heaven’ you mention is none other than the apparition of the ‘Blood Emperor’ Alista Tudor.”

“But how did the Blood Emperor's apparition find its way to my home?” Franca didn't immediately connect it to Alista Tudor, but Lumian's deductions were beginning to make sense.

The special fish-scale armor and the Spell of Harrumph, which originated from myths and legends, made her suspect that the Armored Shadow came from back home. And now, the language basically matched, making her even more certain.

Lumian nodded, continuing, "I'll have to start with the events at the Samaritan Women's Spring, where Madame Hela and I fetched the water..."

"You went with Madame Hela?" Franca murmured, her curiosity piqued but allowing Lumian to proceed.

Lumian went on to recount the events at the Samaritan Women's Spring in detail, ensuring Franca remained focused on his narrative. He then presented his theory.

"I suspect that during the War of the Four Emperors, the Blood Emperor did not fully perish. For some extraordinary reason, He preserved a fragment of His lingering soul. During the godly war, a passage was opened between our world and your homeland, allowing a mysterious river from your world to infiltrate ours. Mr. Fool sealed it, creating the Samaritan Women's Spring.

"This river appears closely tied to the realms of death and the Underworld. The Blood Emperor's apparition, trapped in a state of death, traverses between your world, the Samaritan Women's Spring, and even the Fourth Epoch Trier.

"The Blood Emperor possesses an innate desire for resurrection, and the first step to achieving that is to escape the river's confinement. In this process, He brought chaos to the Underworld of your homeland. The powerful Beyonder from the domains of Death and the Underworld had no choice but to make the ultimate sacrifice, immersing themselves in the mysterious river to harness its power fully and seal away the Blood Emperor's apparition."

Franca alternated between confusion and clarity. When Lumian finished sharing his theory, she responded with a mixture of surprise and suspicion, saying, "Your guess seems quite realistic and logical..."

His explanation shed light on the words of the Armored Shadow and the peculiar occurrences at the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Franca fell into a brief silence, then continued, "Back in my homeland, that elusive and mysterious river is known as the Yellow Springs."

"However, before I transmigrated, the Yellow Springs and the netherworld were nothing more than legends, unverifiable myths. There were no tales of the Blood Son of Heaven or the Underworld Daoist..."

"Could it be that I was just an ordinary person who never had the opportunity to encounter such things?"

Lumian chuckled.

"Before I discovered Aurore was a Warlock, concepts like superpowers, demons, and ghosts were nonexistent."

Franca acknowledged his words, her expression gradually shifting towards excitement.

“Now that there's a passageway connecting our worlds, returning home is no longer an unattainable dream!”

Lumian, in a friendly tone, warned, “Madame Hela mentioned that the pale-white spring water is deadly to anyone who touches it.”

Franca's expression froze for a moment, then she replied, “That may be true for us now. But with the power of godhood and ascending to sainthood, we might be able to handle it.”

Lumian reminded her again, “There are the figures of an angel and a true god imprisoned in the spring.”

“...” Franca rolled her eyes at Lumian. “Aren't you a buzzkill! Compared to before, when we had no answers, no direction, and no hope, now there's a glimmer of hope. We know where to focus our efforts. One of the reasons Madame Hela went to retrieve the Samaritan Women's Spring might have been to confirm if it's connected to the Yellow Springs. She's truly exceptional at finding leads!”

Lumian simply shrugged, opting not to dampen Franca's newfound optimism and enthusiasm.

Franca's excitement was palpable as she paced back and forth before suddenly posing a question.

“Were you asking where the Armored Shadow came from? Why did it mention the Blood Emperor and Daoist Underworld?”

That wasn't an answer!

Could there be some hidden secret?

Lumian thought for a moment and said, “It's a shadow born after death, and some of its abilities clearly belong to the Death domain. It also has a strong urge to break free from its restraints and escape imprisonment... Given these factors, I believe it's a ghost-like entity sealed by Daoist Underworld. Asking about its origins would inevitably lead to uncovering the current state of the Daoist Underworld, which is why I received that answer.”

Franca was enlightened.

“That makes sense!

“Underworld Daoist destroyed its golden body and sealed it. Could that be why it's collecting gold to reconstruct its golden body and break free from its imprisonment?”

Observing Lumian's puzzled expression, Franca clarified the concept of a golden body and her interpretation.

“Is that so?” Lumian nodded slowly. “It seems like we might be able to continue trading gold with the Armored Shadow in the future, but fully restoring it to its original state should be avoided. This entity is extremely dangerous and holds a deep malice. I wonder what it will do once it escapes its seal.”

Franca agreed wholeheartedly. “At the very least, we need to advance to Sequence 4 before considering this matter.”

Lumian snickered. “Didn't you mention that achieving godhood and becoming a saint is an arduous endeavor? Why the newfound confidence?”

Franca glared at Lumian. “Isn't it because I have a goal now? Can't I indulge in a little daydreaming with all the motivation I have? Seriously, did we switch roles?”

She recalled that not long ago, she had remarked that Lumian made the path to godhood and switching pathways sound too simplistic.

Lumian chuckled and said, “It's good to have a goal and motivation. Yes, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's gathering is coming up next week. Should I inform the others about the Armored Shadow, the Blood Emperor, Underworld Daoist, and the Yellow Springs?”

Franca pondered for a moment and said, “In the past, I would have shared this information, but now I can't do so until I solve the issue with April Fool's Day. However, we can inquire about the illusory river related to death and see if anyone has relevant information.”

Lumian thought for a moment and said, “I'll do the asking.”

Franca was momentarily surprised but quickly understood Lumian's reasoning.

Lumian had gone to the Samaritan Women's Spring with Madame Hela. It made more sense for her companion, who was posing as Muggle, to inquire about the situation at the Samaritan Women's Spring. There was a logical rationale behind it.

From Hela's perspective, Lumian and Hidden Blade were strangers who didn't know each other. If Franca were to casually mention the River of Death, it would undoubtedly raise suspicion.

On Monday, Franca arrived at Trocadéro's Red House Café once again.

This time, she had taken care to dress more in line with her usual attire, wearing a shirt, pants, and boots, even though she still maintained her black-haired, brown-eyed form.

Her intention was to create the illusion that she was a man who had transformed into a Demoness, which she hoped would deter any sudden attacks from the Demoness she was waiting for.

However, the long-haired orange-red Demoness did not appear throughout the morning. Instead, Franca found herself engaged in conversations with two female patrons who took the opportunity to strike up a chat with her.

Franca calmly sipped her coffee, seemingly unfazed by the interactions.

She couldn't help but notice that Lumian appeared unusually calm and encouraged her to take her time. Franca understood the urgency of eliminating the core members of the Bliss Society, particularly those close to Susanna Mattise. Failing to do so would mean Lumian would forever be overshadowed by the Rose School of Thought.

Lumian had already reported to Madam Magician about the Bliss Society, the Rose School of Thought, and the activities at the Red House Café. The response he received was concise: “Do not leave Trier for the time being, and there should be no major issues.”

Lumian ignited the letter and departed Rue du Rossignol, strolling towards Avenue du Marché.

As he approached Salle de Bal Brise, he spotted a familiar figure—a man with dark-brown eyes, a prominent nose bridge, and a flaxen-colored beard that covered his chin. This man wore a robe

reminiscent of an ancient Warlock's attire. It was Secrets Suppliant Osta Trul, the same person who had introduced Lumian to Mr. K's mysticism gathering.

“My cabbage,” Lumian inquired with a smile. “What brings you here?”

Osta Trul responded with a magnetic voice, “I've come to find Baron Brignais to settle my debt.”

“You've got the money?” Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Osta Trul smiled and replied, “Yes, I've come to realize that some honorific names derived from the potion can be used for prayers. There's no danger involved. This discovery has been quite helpful to me.”

Lumian was slightly taken aback by this revelation. With a dark look, he tapped his chest four times—up, down, left, and right.

Osta Trul mirrored his actions with an even warmer smile.

Lumian didn't continue the small talk. He simply waved his hand and walked past Osta Trul.

Quietly, he approached the white spherical statue constructed from skulls outside Salle de Bal Brise, releasing a soft sigh.

At 9 p.m., Lumian returned to Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré. He finally received a letter from a pure silver skull with pale-white flames burning in its eye sockets.

The letter was from Hela, and its content was brief.

“There will be a gathering in one hour.

“If you wish to participate, silently recite the following incantation within five minutes of 10 p.m.”

Chapter 375 Gathering Venue

It's finally here... Lumian exhaled, folded the letter, and left Auberge du Coq Doré.

He didn't need to look for Franca. They had discussed the gathering many times before, so there was no need to waste time confirming it.

Lumian made his way to the new safe house on Rue du Rossignol and tossed the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves onto the bed.

He hadn't prepared an additional iron cabinet. With a few traps hidden in the room, regular thieves couldn't approach the core area. Forcing their way in would only cost them their lives. An iron cabinet wouldn't stop exceptional thieves anyway.

When the time was right, Lumian donned a hooded black robe that bore a striking resemblance to the attire worn by Warlocks, all according to Madame Hela and Franca's descriptions of his sister's appearance at these gatherings.

Then, he pulled out Lie and transformed it into a simple yet exquisite silver-white earring. He secured it onto his right earlobe.

Gazing into the full-length mirror, Lumian maintained a calm demeanor as he observed a sudden transformation of him growing shorter. His hair morphed into a luxuriant shade of pure gold, growing thick and cascading down his back.

His facial features underwent a metamorphosis, mirroring those etched in his memories of Aurore. His nose bridge, now elevated and delicate, complemented his lips, neither too full nor too thin, painted in a subtle shade of red. His eyes, light-blue and clear, emitted a faint but captivating luminescence.

In the past, Lumian had always perceived his sister as a paradox, her inner self contrasting sharply with her outward appearance. She exuded an aura of sunshine, cheerfulness, and open-mindedness, yet in reality, she was a homebody, reluctant to venture out for social interactions. Only those who had truly earned her trust were privileged to witness her relaxed demeanor, the quirky phrases she often uttered, and her playful and bullying side.

On the contrary, Aurore displayed no apprehension when stepping out into the world. Much like Lumian, she possessed the natural ability to connect with the elderly ladies of Cordu and regale the children with captivating stories, earning their affection.

Ever since Lumian had learned about his sister's true background, he had come to comprehend the stark divergence between Aurore's inner self and her external appearance and demeanor. Certainly, many people grappled with such contradictions, but Aurore's unique circumstances had magnified this incongruity.

Lately, Lumian often found himself pondering what his sister had been like and the kind of life she had led.

As he stared into the mirror, Aurore's light-blue eyes seemed to take on a misty quality, as if she too were lost in reminiscences of days gone by.

Lumian still held vivid memories of the first time his sister had mentioned her homeland. It happened during his second year in Cordu.

Back then, when the shepherds had returned to the highland pastures, Aurore had taken him to pat the newly born lambs and, “cruelly” bought their loved ones. They ventured into the green pastures adorned with white and yellow wildflowers, carefully selecting a spot that wouldn't disturb the serene surroundings. They then set up a charcoal grill for a picnic.

As night descended upon them, and the starry heavens unveiled themselves like a boundless river of glistening diamonds, Aurore suddenly drifted into a reverie, her fingers brushing away tears.

Lumian inquired about her thoughts, and she confessed to a profound sense of homesickness.

Aurore's gaze in the mirror seemed to lose focus, mirroring the soft, yellowish-blue glow of the carbide lamp.

The mountain village nestled beside those vibrant green pastures under the radiant sun—it was a place they could never return to.

After a while, Lumian opened the pocket watch he had borrowed from Salle de Bal Brise, confirming the time.

Then, he donned a sleek silver-white half-mask, revealing his finely sculpted lips and chiseled chin to the world.

Without delay, Lumian retrieved a piece of paper adorned with the ancient Feysac script and affixed it securely to his left breast, displaying the word “Muggle.”

As Franca had explained, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society boasted a sizable membership, each member donning unique disguises during their gatherings. Without the corresponding code names, distinguishing one from another would be an insurmountable task, save for those closely acquainted with each other.

Despite hailing from the same world, the society's members hailed from diverse homelands, each with their distinct languages. Upon their transmigration to this world, they found themselves scattered across different countries, inevitably erecting language barriers. Initially, they relied on the linguistic prowess of fellow members who were polyglots. However, over time, they gravitated towards adopting ancient Feysac, the common tongue of the Northern Continent, as their shared language.

For Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members residing in different nations, ancient Feysac bore striking similarities to their mother tongues, easing its acquisition and mastery.

Naturally, there were exceptions among the society's ranks—those whose native languages diverged significantly from ancient Feysac—but they were a minority. They had to follow the majority, knowing that, until they mastered the language, someone would always be there to translate for them.

Lumian had already laid a strong foundation in ancient Feysac. Ever since his arrival in Trier, he had diligently immersed himself in Aurore's grimoires, plunging deeper into this linguistic realm. Basic communication posed no challenge for him any longer.

Approaching 10 p.m., Lumian made final adjustments to his appearance in front of the full-length mirror, ensuring everything was in its rightful place. He concealed an assortment of ritual components and the alcohol flask containing the Decency brooch within the concealed pocket of his Warlock-like black robe.

With Madame Hela's letter clutched firmly in his hand, Lumian began the recitation for the Hermes gathering.

“A Beyonder from ancient times, Ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, noble Mother of the Sky, I beseech your permission to enter your kingdom.”

As the words escaped Lumian's lips, the world around him underwent a sudden and eerie transformation. He beheld his own reflection in the mirror, like a pencil sketch hastily erased by an eraser.

His vision dimmed, plunging him into what felt like the deepest of slumbers.

Abruptly, Lumian's consciousness drifted to the gathering, the pounding of his heart resonating within his ears.

He snapped out of his reverie, finding himself within a palace marked by crumbling stone walls and encroaching weeds.

In its heart lay a massive, weathered stone throne, yet no one ventured near it. Through the fissures in the walls and the timeworn windows, Lumian glimpsed a night shrouded in darkness and cold, veiled by a thick fog.

Faint starlight penetrated the fog, casting a feeble glow upon the palace and the dreamlike town enshrouded by the fog.

The town appeared utterly deserted, as if plucked from a dream. Within the palace, stone candlesticks embedded in the walls flickered, bathing the surroundings in their warm, yellow flames.

At that precise moment, over a hundred figures arrived, each attired in distinctive garments. Lumian scanned the assembly but could not yet spot Madame Hela. However, he recognized Hidden Blade Franca.

Clad in her favored assassin's garb—black robes complemented by leather armor, a hood drawn low, and a silver half-mask gracing her countenance—Franca engaged in conversation with a group of similarly attired individuals.

Yet, among them, Franca stood as the sole genuine Assassin.

Lumian didn't greet Franca. Following her instructions and the hints in Madame Hela's letter, he approached the huge stone chair.

Such a crowded gathering was no different from a marketplace. It was unlikely to form a unified communication and transaction. The gathering naturally fragmented into smaller groups. Only when there was a matter of particular significance would President Gandalf or vice presidents like Hela take their place by the massive stone chair to address the assembly.

Of course, someone could do the same if they wanted to share their intentions with the entire gathering.

Aurore had been a regular attendee at the Academy's gatherings. Their designated meeting spot nestled deep within the palace, tucked away to the left of the huge stone throne.

As Lumian advanced in that direction, he couldn't help but marvel at the mystical nature of the gathering.

After reciting the incantation, he had departed from the Rue du Rossignol safe house in the market district, only to find himself transported to this mysterious and ancient palace.

The members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society hailed from diverse corners of the Northern and Southern Continents, yet they had all managed to converge here within a specific timeframe.

Lumian had never encountered such a mystical power before, surpassing even teleportation. Only the bestowed Sowers of the Great Mother could compare.

What baffled him, however, was Franca's never sharing the method of entering the gathering. Even if they were face-to-face, he wouldn't hear it unless granted permission by Madame Hela.

But it was just reciting an incantation, wasn't it? How could he not hear it?

As Franca had explained, this power likely stemmed from a Sealed Artifact—an Artifact Madame Hela couldn't fully control but could employ to a certain extent.

Beyond this method of convening, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society possessed other means, although these were established by various groups for internal or clique gatherings. For

instance, Hidden Blade Franca had set up a telegram group with select members, utilizing a miniaturized and simplified analyzer for scheduled chats.

Recalling Franca and Hela's rough descriptions of Aurore during the gatherings and forming his own assumptions, Lumian's steps grew lighter.

He believed that, given the unique and shared origin of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, even if his sister wished to remain guarded amidst the assembly, her relaxed demeanor, akin to his interactions with her, would prevail, possibly even more prominently so.

This was a state devoid of profound secrets.

Additional figures began to manifest, their forms rapidly taking shape in the air, akin to oil paintings successfully duplicated.

Among the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, a diverse and eclectic array of disguises flourished. Some were clad in traditional iron-gray full-body armor, while others embraced vibrant red, yellow, white, and multicolored paint, transforming into clowns. A handful sported extravagant makeup veiling their true visages, resembling wicked witches from ancient folklore. Still, others adorned themselves with monstrous helmets sculpted from orange-yellow pumpkins or relied on makeshift hoods to become pale vampires with strikingly red lips. Some even chose horse-like attires that enveloped them from head to toe...

It was a spectacle more fantastical and imaginative than the masquerade balls documented in newspapers and magazines.

As Lumian strolled amidst the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's diverse members, a faint smile played on his lips. Occasionally, he would nod in acknowledgment of those who greeted him.

At last, he reached the corner housing the Academy team.

His eyes naturally swept over the code names displayed on their attires: Pettigrew, Professor, Griffin, Eagle, Bear, Headmaster, Periodic Table, Isotope...

Chapter 376 Different Teams

Pettigrew stood at just over 1.6 meters tall, his disheveled, yellow hair peeking out from under a face mask designed for performances. His right palm was encased in a flamboyant silver glove, and he wore an open brown jacket over a dark shirt.

As Lumian approached, Pettigrew stepped forward, exclaiming in surprise and delight, "Muggle, you've finally reappeared."

Lumian replied with a smile in Aurore's voice, "Something happened some time ago; it took me a while to recuperate."

"Are you alright now?" Pettigrew asked with concern.

"It's alright," Lumian replied nonchalantly, unsure of Aurore's friendship with him.

He turned his gaze to a lady sitting on the stone steps.

The woman donned a black butterfly mask, a white shirt adorned with a bow tie, and a long, dark coat. Pinned to her chest, a clearly typeset paper name tag read: "Professor."

Lumian greeted her with a smile, "Did Associate Professor not make it?"

Associate Professor was a man. A few years back, due to their shared code names, they had met in real life and became husband and wife.

Both were avid Warlocks, delving deep into the study of various spells. Aurore's grimoires contained the Weed Removal spell, courtesy of Associate Professor.

Professor's lips bore a faint hue, and her gaunt face framed her beautiful brown eyes. She simply replied, "He's occupied in the real world, playing host to guests. He couldn't spare the time. Nevertheless, my presence is akin to his; it doesn't alter matters. Muggle, what's the matter?"

Lumian smiled faintly and said, "I want to thank him for his Weed Removal spell."

"What's there to be grateful for? Could it be that your home was overrun by a large number of weeds?" Pettigrew asked curiously.

Lumian mirrored Aurore's expression as he recounted the past. His light-blue eyes darted around as he continued, "Some time ago, I encountered a plant rumored to originate from the Abyss. It not only grew at an astounding rate but also possessed remarkable vitality. It emitted anesthetic gasses and devoured humans like a man-eating flower. Whenever it surfaced, it did so in the hundreds, if not thousands. The Weed Removal spell, however, could wither them all. While it didn't annihilate them outright, it rendered them dormant for a considerable duration."

"Weed Removal works on Beyonder plants?" Professor exclaimed in astonishment.

Lumian nodded and said, "But it's effective only against grass or vine-type plants."

These were the insights Aurore had penned in her grimoires.

It was evident she had conducted experiments with the Abyss Demon Flower of the Padre, meticulously documenting her findings with scholarly dedication, even when her condition was clearly off.

"This is an interesting discovery." Professor held Lumian's hand, delving into the intricacies of the Weed Removal spell.

Fortunately, Lumian had delved deeply into this spell and sought guidance from Franca and Madame Hela. Though he couldn't use it, his knowledge was sufficient for a conversation.

After a lengthy discussion on spells and mystical knowledge with the Academy team, Lumian suddenly sensed a looming presence, casting a shadow over his surroundings.

Raising his eyes, he beheld an immense figure.

This figure towered at an imposing 2.4 meters, draped in a plain linen robe. Its head was concealed beneath a hood, and in its grip, a formidable magic staff, capable of shattering the skulls of ordinary humans, was held.

It was none other than Gandalf, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Franca had suggested that he might have reincarnated as a middle-aged man within the Feysac

Empire, endowed with a giant bloodline. He had a penchant for liquor and an insatiable thirst for mystical knowledge, yet the nature of his pathway remained an enigma. Sometimes, he displayed traits of the Reader pathway, embodying characteristics of a Savant and Mystery Pryer. At other times, it made people feel that with his physical condition, it would be a pity not to take the Warrior pathway.

High-end mystical knowledge like the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Indestructibility originated from Gandalf.

Oddly, Franca's expression took on a peculiar twist when mentioning Gandalf, as though his code name didn't quite align with his towering stature and imposing presence.

Gandalf, his visage obscured by an eerie shadow, fixed his gaze upon Lumian and gruffly extended a smile.

“You've missed a few gatherings. I was concerned something might have befallen you.”

Lumian responded with pursed lips, his momentary sigh and helplessness hidden beneath the surface. “Something did happen, but it's been resolved.”

“That's reassuring.” Gandalf nodded in relief.

Following a few more courteous exchanges with Lumian, he made his way towards the other teams.

This was Lumian's first time participating in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's discussions. Following Madame Hela's counsel, he adopted a stance of speaking less and listening more. Often, he remained in silence.

Throughout this process, Lumian, now seated on the stone steps, observed those who spoke with a faint smile, projecting an aura of extreme attentiveness.

Aurore often employed a similar tactic. When conversing with Madame Pualis and the elderly ladies in Cordu, she would grace the speaker with a warm smile, making them feel truly valued. The discussion might be captivating, but beneath her apparent engagement, Aurore's thoughts would occasionally drift. She would intermittently return to grasp the essential points, safeguarding against potential awkwardness when she needed to respond.

Of course, when it came to discussions of mystical knowledge or striking deals, Lumian remained fully engaged, simply mirroring Aurore's demeanor.

After a while, Lumian found a suitable moment to rise from his spot, signaling his intention to depart from the Academy team's gathering area.

A lady, her face adorned with removable oil paint, exclaimed in surprise, “Aren't you purchasing anything today?”

Do you really need to spend a small fortune at every gathering to find joy, Grande Soeur? Lumian muttered silently and smiled.

“I have two reasons. Firstly, I've recently hit a bottleneck and am more focused on gathering the formula and ingredients for the Scrolls Professor potion...”

He spoke earnestly while analyzing the absence of corresponding requirements. Finally, he said, "Secondly, I'm broke and owe someone a substantial sum."

Members of the Academy team chuckled warmly, their understanding evident.

They had all noticed that Muggle had met with a significant problem during her hiatus from the gatherings, transforming from a well-off individual into someone burdened with debt.

However, they weren't overly concerned for Muggle. Over the past few years, they had witnessed their companion's knack for accumulating wealth.

Gracefully, Lumian made his way to the third pillar on the right of the colossal stone chair, where the Purgatory team congregated. Madame Hela frequently engaged in their discussions.

The lady was already present, albeit with a noticeable reduction in the chill that enveloped her. Under her veiled hat was a blur, revealing only a pale, yet not dismal, white complexion.

Silently, Lumian observed the discussions and dealings of the Purgatory team. After a while, he inquired thoughtfully, "Have any of you heard of an illusory river associated with the domain of death?"

Hela cast a fleeting glance at Lumian but remained silent.

Another member of the Purgatory team, a man bearing the code name Cerberus, pondered the question and responded, "Muggle, why do you ask?"

"I've heard rumors of an illusory river deep within the Underworld, within the realm of hell. It's said to be connected to one of the High-Sequence Beyonders of the Corpse Collector pathway."

He actually answered without hesitation and didn't seek compensation for the intel, even though it's only hearsay and not verified fact... Lumian smiled and said, "I've recently been intrigued by the presence of such a river in both the myths and legends of our homeland and here."

He raised the topic indirectly without delving into further details.

Cerberus pondered for a moment before commenting, "This might be rooted in the commonality between the origins of myths and human thought."

Lumian tersely acknowledged with Aurore's voice and didn't inquire further.

He listened for a while longer before turning his attention to a hole in the ancient palace.

With his previous preparations in place, Lumian could smoothly blend into the April Fool's team, allowing him to eavesdrop on their conversations.

As Lumian made his way to the designated location, he quickly reviewed what he had observed and heard.

He couldn't help but notice that his sister, Aurore, had garnered quite a bit of popularity. Both the members of the Academy and the Purgatory team had shown her kindness.

While moving diagonally through the ancient palace, Lumian's attention was drawn to a man with stockings covering his head. This individual leaped onto a broken pillar and addressed the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, who were clad in various eccentric outfits.

“Allow me to recite a poem!

“Ocean, you are all water;

“Horse, you have four legs.

“Demoness, you truly taste great!”

This isn't a poem at all... Lumian had already purchased Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles, which included jests about the Emperor having a more than friendly relationship with a Demoness. In the diary, he even commented on the taste of Demonesses.

With one step following another, Lumian approached the April Fool's team. He spotted a man with his back turned to him, dressed in a black seer's robe. Behind this figure, an ancient Feysac word was inscribed in golden paint: “Loki.”

Franca had mentioned that Loki was a figure from certain legends in their world, associated with lies, mischief, and flames. This member bearing the code name ‘Loki’ is the founder of the April Fool's team. Although he has progressed on the paths of the divine at a pace not inferior to Hela and the others, he hasn't ascended to the position of vice president... Various pieces of information flashed through Lumian's mind.

He entered the area where the April Fool's team was, and all laughter abruptly ceased.

In unison, Loki and the others turned to face Lumian, who was clad in a half-mask and a black Warlock robe.

As Muggle, Lumian's lips curved into a radiant smile.

“Long time no see, everyone.”

Chapter 377 An Earlier Transmigrator

Facing Lumian's greeting, the dozen or so members of the April Fool's team fell silent.

Among them, several people's gazes and body language gave Lumian the distinct feeling that something was amiss.

There was “Bard” wearing stockings to conceal his appearance, “Hisoka” with a half-mask, vertical red hair, and teardrop and star makeup on his face, “Mad Lady” sporting red, yellow, and white clown paint, and “Ultraman” in comical attire.

Some of these April Fool's team members appeared surprised and puzzled, while others subtly shrank back. Some narrowed their eyes, and others changed their postures, becoming even more vigilant than before.

If Lumian hadn't sought guidance from Psychiatrist Anthony Reid during this time and focused on observing the guilty's reactions when they realized their victim was still alive, he wouldn't have been able to discern these differences so clearly. He might have missed something important.

In contrast, Lumian's earlier suspects, “Loki” and “I Know Someone,” had more normal reactions.

The former was the founder and leader of the April Fool's team. If anything unusual occurred within the team, the chances of him remaining unaffected were slim. According to Franca, he was believed

to be a member of the Spectator pathway, possibly a Psychiatrist. However, Aurore's understanding of this pathway was notably deficient. Her grimoires didn't align with the details uncovered in the dream.

Dressed in a black circus divination-style robe, Loki obscured his face with the shadows of his hood, seemingly unconcerned about being identified.

After a brief silence, he expressed his surprise, saying, "Muggle, you've reappeared.

"I thought you lost control and went mad after hearing the Hidden Sage's cram school classes, and that's why you haven't attended any gatherings for months."

"Rap, it's rap, not cram school classes," corrected Bard with a smile.

Lumian had learned from Franca that "rap" was a strange form of music that some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society liked to compare to the ravings of unknown entities.

Muggle's thin red lips curled up slightly in response.

"I did show signs of madness, but I managed it."

In the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, this was a common topic. Many members had lost control for various reasons, turning into monsters or even dying. As a result, Psychiatrists could make a killing by treating their companions' psychological or mental problems during gatherings.

Dressed in a white coat and wearing a bird-beak mask, I Know Someone nodded.

"Last year, I assessed your mental and psychological state. There wasn't much of a problem, but you haven't had regular assessments in nearly a year. You need to be careful. I know someone who was careless and overconfident and ended up in an asylum."

This Psychiatrist appeared normal enough and was genuinely concerned about his patient's condition. However, his membership in the April Fool's team raised some suspicions for Lumian. At the very least, his mental state didn't seem entirely healthy.

As a prankster, Lumian didn't despair about the future or made it his life's mission to seek fun. Having such circumstances would undoubtedly put a toll on their psychological well-being.

Loki didn't press further about Muggle's absence from numerous gatherings. He spread his hands and addressed all the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society in the April Fool's team's spot.

"Everyone, I've recently come across another transmigrator from history!"

"Who is it?" Bard with stockings blurted out, and the other members turned their attention to Loki.

Taking note of everyone's gazes, Loki gestured meaningfully and continued, "I've obtained ancient texts that mention the existence of an Ancient Sun God in the Third Epoch.

“Haven't we always been puzzled by the scriptures of the various Churches, especially the Eternal Blazing Sun Church? Don't they bear a striking resemblance to the religious texts of our world?”

“Now, I believe I've found the answer.”

As the leader of the April Fool's team spoke, he tapped his chest four times—top, down, left, right—as if indicating a religion from his homeland.

Lumian's eyelids twitched.

Mr. K had made the same gesture while praying to that entity!

Was it merely a coincidence, or was there an inevitable connection?

Furthermore, wasn't the Ancient Sun God the father of the angel at Salle de Bal Unique?

Loki continued in an exaggerated tone, “Yes, just as you suspect. The scriptures of the various Churches are derived from the Ancient Sun God, but they have different focuses and have altered certain details.

“I've only managed to find a few of that entity's books, but I can confirm they're from our world.

“I hope you can gather more information about the Ancient Sun God and eventually confirm that He too is a transmigrator, possibly even predating Roselle. If you wish to see the books I've obtained, remember to request a trade later. 100 grams of gold or an equivalent currency for a copy is a very reasonable price, don't you think? We're all on the same side, and this discovery holds the key to our hopes of returning home. Otherwise, I wouldn't sell it for such a small amount of gold.”

The comical-looking Ultraman let out a sigh and said, “It's all rather pointless. I believe you think that this entity, who has become a deity, must have a better understanding of the world's truth than us. He might have already unraveled the secret of transmigration and the way back. But according to your information, didn't He also fail to return?”

“See the light!” Loki's lips curled up. “And I suspect that the reason that individual couldn't return is because He perished in a divine battle.”

“Sounds intriguing,” Hisoka, dressed in clothes with poker card patterns, suddenly chimed in.

Loki slowly scanned the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society and flashed a smile.

“The information about that entity and the ancient books related to it has been deliberately erased, with only a small number of them circulating in secret. Most are hidden underground near the source of power left behind by that entity.

“It's said that in those places, the higher your Sequence, the more dangerous it becomes. It's easier to lose control. Ordinary Beyonders like us stand a chance to approach. Perhaps it holds the truth about the connection between our two worlds and a way to return to our homeland.”

At this point, Loki's gaze passed over Lumian's masked face.

Is he subtly encouraging Aurore and the other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society to venture underground? Lumian maintained his vigilance against any potential “pranks.”

However, there was another reason why he sensed a potential issue instantly. Madam Justice had mentioned that the higher one's Sequence, the more dangerous it would be when approaching the Samaritan Women's Spring. She had also explained the nature of the problem.

This led Lumian to suspect that the Ancient Sun God's location mentioned by Loki might be a place similar to the Samaritan Women's Spring. He knew firsthand how perilous and terrifying the Samaritan Women's Spring could be!

Inciting others to explore underground in their quest to return home while avoiding the risks himself, or is this merely a prank that could harm others without benefiting Loki? Lumian glanced at Loki's profile and deliberately interjected, “I've been pondering a similar question lately.

“Why do many myths and legends in this world involve an illusory river associated with the domain of death, just like in our homeland?

“Could it be the result of some senior who transmigrated back?”

Given Lumian's knowledge of Aurore, he knew she couldn't resist getting involved if she caught wind of any leads regarding returning to her hometown. Since he had questions of his own, he needed to steer the conversation away from Loki's direction. Finding a relevant topic was his best strategy.

This was a lesson Lumian and his sister had learned through their battles of wits and pranks over studies, homework, exams, combat, and pranks.

Mad Lady, adorned with red, yellow, and white clown paint, chuckled and remarked, “Human nature, my dear, humans tend to blend their own experiences into myths and legends. In ancient times, they relied on water for survival, so they believed there should be a river in the afterlife. Likewise, when they dug graves, the deeper they went, the more likely they'd encounter an underground river.”

Lumian, emulating Aurore's tone, responded, “Your explanation is quite scientific, but I think it lacks mysticism. And if we aim to return, mysticism might be just what we need.”

He recounted the legend of the River Styx, which he had recently acquired from the Purgatory team, and concluded, “I believe this could also be a path worth exploring.”

Loki's face remained hidden in the hooded shadows as he chuckled and remarked, “Although the Underworld should be somewhere in the spirit world, I believe it must be closely related to the underground. In numerous folklores from the Northern and Southern Continents, ‘hell’ is often depicted as being hidden underground.

“That's why our investigation needs to be centered on the underground. Whether it's the remains of the Third Epoch's Ancient Sun God or issues related to the River Styx, we must delve deep underground to truly connect with these mysteries.”

Lumian couldn't help but mutter to himself, You just want everyone to meet their end faster...

He pretended to be engaged and continued sharing information about the Ancient Sun God, underground exploration, and the River Styx with Loki, I Know Someone, and the other members of the April Fool's team.

After almost twenty minutes of conversation, Lumian decided to step away from the April Fool's team's vicinity.

He had already sensed abnormal reactions from at least four members of the April Fool's team. The next step was to leave this to Hidden Blade Franca.

If there was indeed something awry with the April Fool's team, they would be highly cautious when dealing with Muggle. They wouldn't readily engage or probe, fearing they might fall into a trap.

Their primary objective should be observation and indirect information gathering at this point.

When it came to Hidden Blade, they could play pranks without reservations. Later on, Franca could use those pranks as an excuse to locate the April Fool's team members in the real world and confront them individually. She could win the support of other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Whether they could extract any significant information during these confrontations remained to be seen.

As Lumian took a few steps away from the gathering, he spotted the 2.4-meter-tall president, Gandalf, approaching the massive stone chair and addressing the group with a resounding voice, “Everyone, I have something important to discuss.”

Chapter 378 Investigation

Lumian halted and turned his attention toward the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, who was dressed in a linen robe.

The nearly half-giant Gandalf didn't require mechanical contraptions or mystical techniques to project his voice throughout the ancient palace.

“I just had a conversation with Isotope and noticed a matter that deserves our attention.

“He mentioned that ever since advancing to Sequence 6, he's been encountering Beyonders more frequently and getting involved in Beyonder affairs.

“This aligns with my general observations over the past few years. You know I enjoy talking to every member and asking about the additional changes brought about by superpowers. For me, I've delved deeper into the paths of the divine than most, gaining a profound understanding.

“Having said that, I want to share a conclusion.

“There are almost no exceptions. As Beyonders progress in Sequence, the frequency of mystical matters involving them significantly increases. At Sequence 9, this phenomenon isn't prominent. But starting from Sequence 7 or even Sequence 6, even those who typically don't pay much attention to such matters will feel that they are constantly encountering Beyonder events.

“Let me illustrate with numbers. At Sequence 9, the assumed number of Beyonder incidents or encounters with other Beyonders each season is 1. This can easily slip under the radar during mysticism gatherings and small circle activities you participate in. It's challenging to pinpoint precisely. Now, at Sequence 8, it's 2. For Sequence 7, it might surge to 5 or 6. In other words, one may come across one or two Beyonder incidents or unfamiliar Beyonders once or twice a month.

“Do you have any thoughts or speculations about this phenomenon? Can you discern the cause? Perhaps there are fundamental laws of mysticism at play.”

Lumian fell into a daze.

Isn't this the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence?

This transmigrator, code-named Gandalf, possessed a sharp investigative spirit. He was astute in noticing even the smallest details and had actually uncovered the outward signs of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence!

He was also the one who had suggested that advancing to Sequence 9 and Sequence 8 in recent years would be easier than before, even allowing for the direct consumption of Beyonder characteristics. He had provided a more precise assessment of the increased risk.

A research-focused talent... Lumian sighed, using Aurore's usual terminology.

For someone like him, with an evil god's angel sealed within and a deity-level aura shrouding him, the manifestation of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence was so intense that it couldn't be ignored. Anyone would recognize the problem.

What do you mean one or two Beyonder incidents a month?

It's practically every week!

Including the Beyonders he had encountered, it could be said to be a daily occurrence!

However, at times, Lumian felt that the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence hadn't fully played its role. Only by attracting members of the Sinners organization and Roche Louise Sanson's family to Avenue du Marché and coincidentally meeting them would it qualify.

Perhaps the power of a boon wasn't as potent as the convergence of Beyonder characteristics, or perhaps Termiboros's seal had mitigated the effect. In any case, his desire remained unfulfilled.

As someone who had taken his sister's place at the gathering, Lumian refrained from approaching Gandalf directly and offering a substantial price for information on the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence.

Casually scanning the area, he noticed Madame Hela and Hidden Blade Franca remaining silent, listening to the discussions among members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society regarding this phenomenon.

Lumian knew that Franca was familiar with the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence. With Hela's concealed knowledge from her exploration of the Samaritan Women's Spring, she should have observed such a phenomenon.

They didn't explicitly mention the term "convergence" due to their different motivations. For Franca, as long as she didn't seek to ascend to godhood, immediate understanding of the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence wasn't necessary. She just needed to recognize the corresponding phenomena and avoid risks. The specific details could be sold at the gathering when she needed funds and gained Madam Judgment's approval.

As various groups engaged in fervent discussions about President Gandalf's topic, Lumian made his way toward the Academy team.

As Lumian continued on his path, he spotted Hidden Blade Franca approaching.

"Muggle? You're finally back at the gathering! I was genuinely worried something had happened to you!" Franca's expressions were slightly exaggerated, but it was well within the norm for her. In the eyes of all the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, she was known for her rich emotions and her love for interacting and experimenting.

Lumian pursed his lips and offered a smile.

"Something did come up, but it got sorted out."

Impressive mental resilience. He didn't react strongly when the Cordu disaster was mentioned. Franca looked at Muggle's exposed lower face with curiosity and asked, "What happened?"

"A mysticism catastrophe," Lumian replied, taking on a resistant demeanor.

Franca knew when to change the subject and shifted the conversation with a smile.

"Just a while ago, in the April Fool's group, Loki mentioned that he stumbled upon another ancient transmigrator known as the Ancient Sun God." Lumian took the initiative to bring up his conversation with April Fool's. "Mad Lady, Hisoka, Bard, and Ultraman are a bit skeptical."

Mad Lady, Hisoka, Bard, Ultraman... Franca and Lumian shared an unspoken understanding. She immediately grasped his intentions—take note of the four April Fool's team members Lumian suspected of being problematic.

Including Loki and I Know Someone, who were often discussed as potential suspects, there were now a total of six individuals.

"Is that true? Besides Emperor Roselle, are there other ancient transmigrators?" Franca asked with genuine excitement.

She wasn't faking it. She had always been interested in ancient transmigrators.

Seeing the opportunity, she bid Muggle farewell and approached the area in the palace where the April Fool's team was located.

Lumian returned to the Academy team and listened as Professor, Isotope, and Pettigrew discussed the mysticism experiences they had encountered.

The gathering had a strict two-hour time limit, but attendees could leave at any moment. They simply needed to recite an incantation, changing the last sentence to "I beseech your permission to leave your kingdom," and they would return to their original location.

Many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society chose to depart early after conducting their business and sharing their concerns, to prevent any accidents from occurring in the real world. However, a significant number of members opted to stay.

For them, the opportunity to interact with people who shared their unique origins and not worry about accidental disclosures of their secrets was a pleasure. Even if their conversations veered into trivial topics, it still improved their emotional well-being and provided relief for their mental and psychological states.

Lumian believed that his sister had found these gatherings quite relaxing. Thus, he partly attended to impersonate her and show no difference while also enjoying the atmosphere on Aurore's behalf, patiently remaining until the end.

Vaguely, he sensed that his emotions were becoming more sensitive and easily stirred. It was as if Aurore's soul fragment had risen to the surface and was affecting his psyche.

As the gathering drew to a close, Professor, wearing a shirt with a bowtie, turned her attention to Lumian and inquired, "Muggle, are you still residing in the south?"

Hmm, she's not referring to a specific country... Does she know that Aurore is in Intis? Lumian's thoughts raced as he responded candidly, "No, I've already moved to the Trier greater region."

A smile curved on Professor's lips.

"Associate Professor and I are also residing in Trier. Would you be interested in an offline gathering?"

"I'm in the Trier greater region as well," Pettigrew chimed in eagerly. Periodic Table and Isotope nodded in agreement.

An offline gathering... Aurore did occasionally go out for a few days in the past. Could she have attended a real-life gathering with Professor and the others? Different circles have different styles. Franca and her associates have a telegram group, and these individuals from the Academy participate in real-life gatherings depending on the region? Lumian pondered for a moment and replied, "Another time. After I've sorted out some personal matters."

He intentionally brought up certain personal matters, hoping that this information might reach the April Fool's suspects like Loki and Mad Lady.

"Alright." Professor and the others acknowledged. After all, Muggle had previously revealed that something had occurred to her.

...

“A Beyonder from ancient times, the ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, the noble Mother of Heaven, I beseech your permission to leave your kingdom.”

With each repetition of the incantation, the figures in the ancient palace gradually faded away.

When Lumian regained consciousness, he found himself back in the safe house on Rue du Rossignol.

How magical... Compared to this, Mr. K's mysticism gatherings are like comparing my safe house to Emperor Roselle's summer palace. They're on entirely different levels. The contrast is quite significant... Lumian sighed and returned to his original appearance.

He wasn't in a rush to write to Madam Magician to report the Armored Shadow's response or to inquire about the Ancient Sun God. Instead, after changing his clothes, he headed straight to 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches and knocked on the door of Apartment 601.

Jenna had gone to visit her brother and wouldn't return until the next morning. Franca sat in a recliner, muttering as if cursing someone.

“What's bothering you?” Lumian asked as he settled onto the divan.

“That rascal Loki. I wanted to buy some information from him, but he told me others could pay with gold, but not me,” Franca replied indignantly. “He said he wanted to experience the taste of a Demoness. Damn it, why didn't he drink the potion and become a Witch himself? After I cursed him, he claimed it was a joke and sold me the ancient information.”

She chuckled after recounting the encounter.

“Although there's a special barrier in the gathering venue that prevents us from tracing the ownership and location of the items we trade, the essence of the items can't be concealed. Regarding the copy of the information, it includes details such as the type of paper, which factory it originated from, the model of the mechanical typewriter or printing machine used to produce it, and even the approximate location. This could provide some clues. It might help us locate Loki in the real world. Of course, that's assuming he hasn't taken any anti-divination measures, misdirection, or hidden anything.”

As Franca spoke, she took out a mirror and prepared for Magic Mirror Divination.

After reciting the incantation, the mirror darkened, accompanied by the faint sound of water.

Franca held the copy of the information she had obtained from Loki and inquired thoughtfully, “Where can we find the mechanical typewriter used to create this information?”

Within the mirror, an aged voice responded, “Trier, Alone Bar.”

Chapter 379 Bold Speculation

Alone Bar? Lumian was taken aback by the answer.

Loki, the founder of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's April Fools' team, is actually in Trier and connected to the Alone Bar?

Isn't this a little too coincidental?

Lumian's impression of the Alone Bar was that it stood diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique. In the basement, there was a theater for marionette shows. The lighting was dim, and the colors were dark, giving it a slightly sinister appearance.

Initially, he didn't see it as a problem, but now that he knew that the monocle-wearing patrons of Salle de Bal Unique were in a superimposed state of being "Amon" and "Not Amon," he believed that the Alone Bar, which could compete with this dance hall and survive, wasn't simple.

Moreover, he had once observed Leah from Bureau 8 entering the bar. He suspected it to be Bureau 8's covert hideout, designed to keep an eye on the Amons at Salle de Bal Unique.

Could Loki also be a member of Bureau 8, a true official Beyonder?

Or was it possible that he merely resided in Quartier de l'Observatoire and recognized the uniqueness of Alone Bar? Was that why he used the mechanical typewriter there to create a copy of the information, preventing anyone from tracing it back to him?

"What's the matter?" Franca watched Lumian furrow his brow and plunge into deep thought. After a prolonged silence, she extended her right hand and waved it in front of his eyes.

Lumian contemplated for a moment and said, "There's a significant issue with this bar."

"You're familiar with this bar?" Franca looked surprised.

This man appeared to harbor many secrets she was unaware of!

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"We'll need to start with Madame Hela and me searching for the Samaritan Women's Spring."

Franca was taken aback. "How many times do I need to have you give out every detail? Are you a tube of toothpaste, giving out a little with each squeeze?"

"The focus was on the situation at the Samaritan Women's Spring, and this all happened along the way," Lumian explained, without feeling embarrassed.

Starting from his encounter with the Islander swindler, Monette, and his repeated scares, he connected Charlie being swindled, the uniqueness of Salle de Bal Unique, and Madam Magician's connection to Amon. Finally, he mentioned that Alone Bar was diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique, and an official member of Bureau 8 had once entered and exited.

Franca felt like she was listening to a ghost story. She subconsciously wanted to hug a pillow, but there was none on the recliner.

Quickly shaking off her daze, she straightened her back, trying to maintain an expression that suggested a "true man" wouldn't be frightened by such a terrifying incident.

All this was used to torment Jenna!

After Lumian finished speaking, Franca hissed and said, "You've had quite the array of experiences. You've even encountered an old monster that only exists in horror stories."

"Why didn't you warn me earlier? That Islander swindler shows up in the market district from time to time. What if I run into him one day?"

"It's for your own safety. If you didn't suspect anything when you encountered him, he wouldn't pay you any attention. But now, if your demeanor changes when you see him, he might become suspicious and involve you in his Parasitism," Lumian warned, half-scaring Franca.

"That's true." Franca gritted her teeth and added, "The next time I meet him, I'll pray for the angel's protection from Mr. Fool when I get home!"

She pushed aside her fear of the Amons and steered the conversation back to the main topic.

"This all ties into the Alone Bar. Investigating it in the future is going to be very challenging..."

Franca suddenly had an imaginative guess.

"Do you think Loki has already been parasitized by an Amon?"

Lumian struggled to follow Franca's train of thought and responded, "Huh?"

Franca continued, her tone grave, "Consider this. The books and legends of the Ancient Sun God have been missing for two to three thousand years, and since the Churches of the Seven Gods' bibles are copied from Him, they must have erased relevant information. How did Loki come by this information?"

"While there are various possibilities, if he is indeed Amon, it would make sense. No one knows His father's situation better than Him.

"As a child of a transmigrator, not to mention that He can obtain Loki's memories through Parasitism, even if He can't, He can perfectly act as our companion. You also mentioned that He enjoys deceit and has frightened you a few times. This is very similar to Loki's usual behavior.

"And when Amon from Salle de Bal Unique created the duplicate, he deliberately went to the Alone Bar diagonally opposite to use a mechanical typewriter to mislead potential tracing. This also fits with this style."

Franca's bold imagination surprised Lumian. After a moment of thought, he responded, "This does explain why this information oddly points to the Alone Bar.

"Under the guidance of this evil angel, the April Fool's team gradually felt despair for the future and pursued their own joy. It was a reasonable development for them to start targeting other members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

“However, Amon wouldn't intentionally lead the information to the Alone Bar, as that would naturally make investigators suspect Him, who resides diagonally opposite...

“Perhaps He anticipated the investigators' thoughts,” Franca countered.

Lumian shook his head slowly.

“If it were Amon, your divination would have been misled or you wouldn't have received an answer.

“Yes, regardless, this is indeed a possibility. I plan to visit the Alone Bar for a drink in the next two days and investigate the situation on the ground, but I won't delve further.”

Franca acknowledged his words tersely and sighed.

“In truth, I also realize that the likelihood of Loki being parasitized by an Amon is very low. Our primary purpose in attending the gathering is to transition into a special state. In this state, the Sealed Artifact borrowed from Madame Hela should be able to detect any abnormalities in each member's bodies. It won't transform the corresponding object and leave it where it is.

“Sigh, I'm just finding excuses for myself. It's not wise for us to pursue Loki without substantial evidence and strong suspicion.

“It makes me feel like I've betrayed the Research Society and my companions. That's why I hope that Loki was indeed parasitized by Amon. That way, I won't experience a similar sense of guilt. I'd be helping the Research Society eliminate hidden dangers.”

Filtering abnormalities in the body by entering a special state and attending the gathering? But nothing happened to Termiboros... Lumian wondered if it was because Mr. Fool's seal was unique or if Madame Hela's Sealed Artifact lacked the ability to filter abnormalities and guard against parasitic angels like Amon.

However, he didn't voice any objections at the moment and instead smiled.

“In my view, there's definitely something amiss with Loki. It's just a question of whether it's a major or minor issue.

“When he sold you the information, did he encourage you to explore the underground and seek out more remnants of the Ancient Sun God?”

“He did,” Franca confirmed. “He also mentioned that in such places, the higher the Sequence, the more dangerous it is. It's easier to lose control. Only Low-Sequence Beyonders like us can approach it.”

“That's only a relative perspective. Did you find it dangerous when I explored the Samaritan Women's Spring earlier?” Lumian inquired.

“It was extremely dangerous,” Franca acknowledged, knowing much about the matter.

And you don't even know that the Blood Emperor's apparition nearly caught me... Lumian muttered, “Searching for the remnants of the Ancient Sun God will likely be even more dangerous.

“If Loki doesn't make an attempt, he'll be essentially using you as cannon fodder by encouraging you to explore underground. And if he does try, he'll inevitably be corrupted and gradually mutate. He lacks the purification of a great existence like Mr. Fool.

“So, it's crucial to locate Loki as soon as possible. It's in both your and his best interests.”

Franca bit her lip and agreed, “You're right. Loki clearly has malicious intentions in this matter. The other members of the April Fool's team might be curious and willing to participate, but I believe they're cooperating with him.”

After persuading Franca, Lumian asked curiously, “Tell me, the prerequisite for entering the gathering is to enter a special state. What state is it?”

Franca, no longer hesitating, shared eagerly, “I've asked my Major Arcana card holder about it before. Although I couldn't reveal the incantation or provide a detailed description of the gathering, she speculated that it involves a ‘Concealment’ power based on my description and its effects.”

“Concealment” power... Lumian nodded.

It was indeed well-concealed. Even the incantation had been hidden, preventing anyone from discovering it.

Franca went on, “The power of Concealment is associated with the Evernight pathway, which is the divine pathway controlled by the Evernight Goddess Church.”

She lowered her voice and added, “I suspect that Madame Hela is affiliated with the Church of Evernight.”

“Similar to 007?” Lumian inquired. He hadn't encountered 007 today, as too many people had participated in the gathering, and he didn't know the usual attire or team of 007.

Franca tersely confirmed his assumption.

“Something along those lines, but she may hold a more significant position. She's at a higher level and has access to more concealed knowledge.”

Recalling Madame Hela's actions in obtaining the Samaritan Women's Spring, Lumian couldn't help but agree with Franca's assessment.

Indeed, the lady possessed a wealth of secret knowledge. Moreover, she wore a black diamond ring that clearly exceeded ordinary mystical items and was suspected to possess godlike powers.

Additionally, the Sealed Artifact she had borrowed to convene the gathering was beyond Lumian's imagination.

In a casual manner, Lumian asked, "What are the primary manifestations of the Evernight pathway's powers?"

According to Aurore's grimoires, the first three Sequences of this pathway were Sleepless, Midnight Poet, and Nightmare. They primarily involved enhancing spirituality, increasing mental strength, reducing the need for sleep, the mystical application of poetry, and the unique ability to induce sleep in others.

Franca thought for a moment and replied, "The power of Concealment, command over spirits, and the ability to create realistic dreams..."

Realistic dream... Lumian was taken aback by the answer.

He couldn't help but recall the realistic dream he had experienced in the ruins of Cordu.

Chapter 380 Bell Chimes

At the conclusion of the Cordu disaster, Lumian found himself not only grappling with the seal within his body and the fading aura of Inevitability surrounding him, but he had also been thrust into a vivid, lifelike dream. Surprisingly, even the investigators, Ryan and the others, succumbed to an uncontrollable slumber as they entered a specific area, becoming entangled in his dream.

During that time, Lumian, who was still unfamiliar with the intricacies of mysticism, failed to sense anything amiss. It was only later, when he enlisted the help of Mr. Poet to decipher the symbolic meanings woven into the dream, that he realized its origins were not tied to Termiboros's power or Mr. Fool's seal. It had a different source, one that conveyed protection and solace.

Ever since that moment, Lumian had tirelessly pondered the origin of this lifelike dream, but he had never unearthed a definitive answer. The possibilities were endless. However, with Franca's detailed account of the Evernight pathway and his own experiences at the gathering, a sudden revelation struck him.

The Evernight pathway, known for inducing nightmarish visions, could also weave the fabric of realistic dreams!

Could it be that Madame Hela, upon learning of Aurore's tragic fate in Cordu, had arrived too late to intervene directly? Perhaps she had resorted to employing the power of a Sealed Artifact to draw me into the lifelike dream, an attempt to provide solace for my tormented soul?

No, there's no need for her to hide this from me and feign ignorance. What's there to hide?

Moreover, if she were responsible, there would be no lingering traces of slumbering power left behind...

Could it be that the continuous use of the incantation involving Concealment powers during the gatherings somehow marked or corrupted Aurore with the Sealed Artifact's influence? When her body disintegrated, the Sealed Artifact sensed the disturbance and, albeit unsuccessfully in saving her, led me into the realm of this lifelike dream?

Yes, it makes sense. Leah and the others were compelled to slumber on the blood-colored mountain peak, situated near the sacrificial ground, close to the three-headed, six-armed giant. This aligns with my theory. The source of the dream's power is intricately tied to Aurore's fate...

Franca observed Lumian's prolonged silence, realizing he was deeply engrossed in contemplation. She wisely refrained from interrupting, allowing him to return to the present before gently inquiring, "What thoughts have crossed your mind?"

"Do you recall the Cordu disaster I mentioned? There's an area around the sacrificial ground, which became the blood-colored mountain peak. Anyone who ventured into it fell into a deep slumber and experienced a realistic dream," Lumian explained succinctly.

The more Franca absorbed his words, the more astonishment and trepidation filled her.

"Could it be that there's something wrong with Madame Hela too?"

"I don't think so." Lumian shook his head in response and outlined the crucial aspects of his conjecture.

Relief washed over Franca, and she couldn't hide her emotions.

"This theory does seem to fit the circumstances."

"Right, did you notice? The initial part of the incantation features a three-line honorific name. This implies that the Sealed Artifact either possesses characteristics of a living entity or was once alive. It's reasonable for it to instinctively influence those who beseech its power."

After careful consideration, Lumian recognized the validity of this point.

The two of them continued their conversation, ultimately deciding that Lumian should find a suitable time to pay a visit to the Alone Bar.

...

Returning to the Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian drew the curtains and settled at the table. Bathed in the soft glow of the carbide lamp, he began composing a letter addressed to Madam Magician.

The letter primarily centered around the Armored Shadow's performance and its response. Lumian was particularly interested in gathering information about the Ancient Sun God and its connection with the Aurora Order.

However, mindful of the late hour, he decided to wait until he "naturally" woke up in the morning, had his breakfast, and then sent the letter.

At noon, Lumian received a reply from Madam Magician, and he felt a sense of satisfaction for having purposely returned to Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré.

"The Armored Shadow's response and its current condition offer us valuable insights into the situation regarding ____."

Lumian was taken aback by the first sentence.

His gaze fixated on the blank portion of the sentence, uncertain whether Madam Magician had intentionally injected humor into her letter or if some form of distortion had affected the message.

Drawing from his knowledge of Magician, Lumian's initial assumption was that she had initially composed the entire sentence but later realized that certain information couldn't be disclosed at this moment. Instead of redacting it or starting anew, she had employed some mystical means to erase the phrase.

Why can't I be privy to this information? It's merely another world, right? Lumian mused as he proceeded to read the subsequent sentence.

“While this is a valuable acquisition, its immediate utility may be limited, though Mr. Hanged Man will undoubtedly be pleased.

“In due time, when he deems it appropriate, he might get you to summon the Armored Shadow once more. He will be responsible for providing compensation in gold for the chance to pose inquiries.

“Let him determine the questions. Your role is to facilitate the communication, and the Two of Cups will handle translation. Oh, and do not forget to request a reward from Mr. Hanged Man.”

Mr. Hanged Man... Lumian repeated the code name, his eyes continuing to scan the contents of the letter.

“The Ancient Sun God's problem is complicated, and my knowledge on the matter is limited. At this juncture, I can only offer this: He was the ruler of the Third Epoch, the one who brought an end to the tyrannical reign of the brutal ancient gods and ushered in an era of light for humanity.

“The entity revered by the Aurora Order maintains a complicated connection with Him. Understanding this connection carries risks. Consider Him as the inheritor of half of His legacy, while the other portion is shared among select members of the seven deities. This division directly gave rise to what we commonly term the Age of the Gods, also known as the Fourth Epoch.”

If remnants of history, legends, documents, and artifacts were still available from the Fourth Epoch, the prior Third and Second Epochs existed mostly within the scriptures of various Churches, veiled in almost mythical obscurity. Lumian possessed only scant knowledge, recognizing the Third Epoch as the Cataclysm Epoch and the Second Epoch as the Dark Epoch.

In Madam Magician's words, Lumian sensed the majesty and allure of ancient history unfolding before him.

The brutal ancient gods, the Ancient Sun God who ended humanity's dark age, the ruler of the Third Epoch whose demise remains shrouded in mystery, and the Age of the Gods that emerged from His corpse...

Why would such an ancient deity give birth to someone like Amon? And who is Amon's mother? Could there be a connection between Amon and the figure revered by the Aurora Order? The more Lumian contemplated this, the more he discerned problems with the Ancient Sun God's method of raising offspring.

He harbored a favorable impression of this deity, not only because of His role in ending the dominion of the ancient gods and offering humanity a glimmer of hope, but also due to the suspicion that He might be an earlier transmigrator from the same world as Aurore and Emperor Roselle.

Simultaneously, Lumian began to understand why Mr. K and the Aurora Order held such vehement disdain for heretics. The one they revered was the rightful heir to the legacy of the Ancient Sun God.

A flame erupted, igniting the letter in Lumian's hand.

He tidied up and fastened the silver Lie earring, making subtle adjustments to his appearance to ensure he bore no resemblance to Lumian Lee.

With that done, he removed Lie and slipped it into a concealed pocket.

His recent insights indicated that his transfigurations from Lie wouldn't end when he was separated from Lie. It was a flesh-and-blood reconstruction. If he wanted to return to his original state, he had to use Lie to adjust it again.

Lumian grabbed his satchel and left Auberge du Coq Doré.

On his way to Avenue du Marché, he heard the chime of a bell, signaling that it was 1 p.m.

Lumian retrieved the golden pocket watch he had borrowed from Salle de Bal Brise and synchronized it with the distant tolling of the bell.

The pocket watch would lose a minute every few days.

After a journey of more than half an hour, Lumian arrived at Rue Ancienne.

His steps led him toward the Alone Bar, and his gaze naturally drifted across Salle de Bal Unique.

At that moment, the establishment had yet to see many customers. Three guards, each sporting a monocle over their right eyes, lounged in various corners, engaged in sporadic conversations or drifting into daydreams.

A postman in a distinctive blue uniform adorned with floral patterns parked his bicycle by the roadside and approached Salle de Bal Unique's mailbox, clutching a stack of letters.

Like the guards, he too wore a monocle on his right eye.

An inexplicable shiver coursed through Lumian's scalp, prompting him to avert his gaze and continue his course into the Alone Bar.

Inside, the dimly lit atmosphere persisted, casting a shadowy ambiance even at noon. At present, Lumian found himself the sole patron.

The bartender stationed behind the bar counter was not the same individual as before. Instead, it was Leah, the Bureau 8 investigator, whom Lumian recognized!

She was attired in a white shirt, a bow tie, and a black knee-length dress. Her hair had been elegantly tied into a simple bun, adorned with tiny silver bells—a departure from her previous appearance, exuding a distinct charm.

“Gin on the rocks,” Lumian stated as he settled onto a barstool at the counter, tapping the surface lightly.

A chuckle escaped him as he continued, “Why do we have a new bartender?”

Leah cast a playful glance in his direction and quipped, “Monsieur, there's no strict rule that dictates a bar must employ only one bartender. That would surely lead to their exhaustion.”

“Fair enough,” Lumian agreed, paying eight licks for his drink and patiently awaiting the arrival of his iced gin.

After savoring his beverage for nearly ten minutes, he casually inquired, “Is there a typewriter available here? I've just remembered a document I need to complete.”

Leah, wiping a glass, responded, “In the room next to the theater in the cellar, there's a typewriter reserved for scripts. It costs 2 licks and 1 coppet for each sheet of paper.”

“That's quite pricey...” Lumian muttered as he rose and entered the cellar with his glass of gin.

He steered clear of the marionette theater, harboring some lingering unease from his previous encounter. Instead, he ventured into a nearby room.

There was indeed a brass mechanical typewriter here, and a man engrossed in reading a newspaper beside it.

Lumian, in line with his prior preparations, proceeded to type out a brief document.

Some of the worn letters on the typewriter matched the information provided by Loki with uncanny precision.

Satisfied with his work, Lumian offered payment to the silent man for his use of the typewriter and paper before promptly exiting the somewhat eerie basement room.

As he returned to the bar's lobby, he was abruptly met with fugue, as he heard the faint chime of a bell.

Lumian swiftly regained his composure and directed his gaze towards Leah, noticing that she displayed no signs of alarm or surprise.

“Did you hear the bell?” Lumian inquired, placing his glass on the bar counter.

Leah furrowed her brow. “The hour has not yet struck. Why would the bell toll?”

Suppressing his bewilderment, Lumian finished his drink and departed the Alone Bar.

While passing Salle de Bal Unique, he observed that only two guards with monocles remained stationed at the entrance. The postman was conspicuously absent.

Without further ado, Lumian continued down the street, putting distance between himself and the establishment.

As he boarded a public carriage headed back to the market district, the clock chimed two o'clock with impeccable precision. Instinctively, Lumian retrieved his pocket watch, opening it to check the time.

To his astonishment, the pocket watch, which he had meticulously calibrated just an hour earlier, had once again slowed down.

A minute slow.