

Inevitability 381

Chapter 381 Elimination

Lumian carefully examined the pocket watch, ensuring that there were no mechanical issues.

He hadn't bumped or jostled it in the past hour, so there should be no reason for it to malfunction.

Ever since I calibrated my pocket watch, the only odd occurrence had been the fugue state and the faint ringing of a bell when I left the Alone Bar. Additionally, there is one less monocle-wearing guard at the entrance of Salle de Bal Unique. Could there be a connection between these events and the sudden one-minute slowdown of my pocket watch? Lumian pondered this seriously, trying to come up with possible explanations.

He planned to write and inquire with Madam Magician once he returned to the market district.

Normally, he wouldn't bother his Major Arcana card holder with such minor issues, but the pocket watch's abnormality had likely started on Rue Ancienne. Moreover, there had been changes in Salle de Bal Unique's Amons. These were reasons to be cautious.

Lumian stowed his pocket watch away. When the public carriage came to a stop, he swiftly disembarked and turned into a nearby street, keeping a vigilant eye on the people and animals passing by.

He changed public carriages three times, each leading to different destinations, attempting to identify and elude any potential pursuers.

This was the self-cultivation of a Hunter.

After completing this elaborate process, Lumian entered a department store. He placed the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves in a public washroom cubicle, put on his Lie earring, and reverted to his original appearance.

He also swapped his brown jacket for a dark vest that he had kept in his satchel, transforming himself back into Ciel Dubois as he returned to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief after sending the letter to Madam Magician, detailing his experiences with the fugue state, the faint bell chimes, and the alterations in Salle de Bal Unique's guards.

Whenever he visited Rue Ancienne, even though he never encountered a genuine disaster, he always felt an unsettling and inexplicable fear gripping his heart.

The puppet messenger swiftly returned with a reply from Madam Magician.

“Your instincts are keen and accurate.

“The fugue you experienced and the bell chimes you heard were the result of Mr. Fool's Angel of Time. He located his target and obliterated Salle de Bal Unique along with all the Amons in Trier. The reason your pocket watch slowed down by a minute was also a consequence of this clash.

“In the near future, you needn't concern yourself with what Amon might do to you. Nevertheless, you should be aware that dealing with such a Mythical Creature is far from simple, and they cannot be completely annihilated. There are still numerous Amons lurking in the various countries of the Northern and Southern Continents, and a few might even be concealed beneath Trier, beyond the reach of angelic powers.”

As Lumian read Madam Magician's response, he was momentarily stunned.

That brief fugue he had experienced indicated a battle on an angelic scale?

Had he not recently calibrated his pocket watch, he might not have gathered any substantial evidence!

And if it weren't for the angelic Termiboros sealed within him, he might have suffered the same fate as Leah—unable to hear the bell or even be in a fugue state!

Is this the might of an angel? The confrontation between the Angel of Time and Amon had not affected the ordinary people in the vicinity. Otherwise, the residents of Rue Ancienne would have died without even realizing it...

The pocket watch had fallen a minute behind... During my momentary fugue, an angel-level battle had unfolded... The Angel of Time, Mr. Fool's Angel of Time, possesses true mastery over time...

Once one crosses the threshold into divinity, their array of abilities take on a mystical quality. The Circle Inhabitant's repetitive loop, the Concealment power of the Evernight pathway, Madam Magician's Door of Starlight, and now the Angel of Time's bell chimes—all of these surpass my wildest imagination... For the first time, Lumian didn't long for the power of a High-Sequence Beyonder solely to resurrect his sister.

It was an innate yearning.

Lumian's spirits lifted at the prospect of no longer living in fear of Amons suddenly emerging from the shadows and thrusting him into peril. He offered genuine praise to Mr. Fool and the Angel of Time, as well as his Major Arcana card holder, Madam Magician.

With a sense of relief, he incinerated the reply and made his way to Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca was waiting for his return with information about the Alone Bar and Loki.

“Good news and bad news. Which one do you want to hear?” he inquired, still grinning, as he closed the door.

Franca sized him up.

“You seem rather cheerful...”

“The good news is that you've found leads on Loki?”

“The bad news is that we lack the strength to continue investigating?”

“Neither.” Lumian seized Franca's reclining chair.

Franca was taken aback. She hadn't expected Lumian to be so shameless.

Before Franca could voice her surprise, Lumian continued, “The good news is that Mr. Fool's Angel of Time has taken action. Salle de Bal Unique and all of Trier's Amons have been wiped out. If Loki shows up at the next gathering, it means he hasn't been Parasitized by an Amon.”

“The bad news is that the copy of the information you bought was indeed created using a mechanical typewriter in the cellar of the Alone Bar. However, we can't continue our investigation while in Bureau 8's territory. I'm quite certain that it's Bureau 8's stronghold.”

Leah was already working there as a bartender.

Franca's expression shifted between excitement and concern.

“Did you see Mr. Fool's Angel of Time? But why didn't I sense any obvious developments in Trier..”

“Indeed, whether Loki is a member of Bureau 8 or not, asking directly about anyone who has recently used that mechanical typewriter will result in us being targeted by Bureau 8. And finding an excuse to use that typewriter to attempt divination with the last user might point to some members of Bureau 8 or even saints.

“There must be a High-Sequence Beyonder overseeing Bureau 8's stronghold diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique!”

Franca, her attention diverted to serious matters, forgot to ask Lumian to leave her exclusive seat.

Lumian recounted the minute delay in his pocket watch and Madam Magician's reply, leaving Franca amazed and fascinated.

After mentioning the Angel of Time, Lumian pondered for a moment and said, “Loki didn't conceal his appearance well at the gathering. I suspect he possesses abilities similar to Niese Face or Lie.”

Franca nodded.

“If he's truly an official member of Bureau 8, I believe he's a Beyonder of the Seer pathway. He's at least a Sequence 6 Faceless. Your Lie corresponds to this Sequence. Yes, many Beyonders in Bureau 8 are from the Seer pathway.”

Above Magician is Faceless? After Lumian obtained Lie, he suspected that it belonged to the Seer pathway, but he didn't know the corresponding Sequence name.

“That's right. This pathway becomes bizarre and difficult to kill after Sequence 7 Magician. It excels at transformations. At Sequence 5, its abilities are even more terrifying. It can silently turn a person into a puppet without a sense of self. Its name is Marionettist.” Franca, who had entered the world of mysticism and joined the Tarot Club earlier than Lumian, clearly possessed more information about the pathways of the divine.

After Lumian conversed with Franca about the Seer pathway, the two of them fell into a dilemma about how to find Loki in reality.

Just then, brisk footsteps echoed upstairs before Jenna opened the door to Apartment 601.

She glanced at Lumian, who was sitting in the recliner, and Franca, who was standing beside him, and asked in confusion, “What are you guys talking about?”

“We're pondering over a conundrum,” Lumian clarified, informing Jenna that he and Franca were in trouble tracking an enemy with the code name Loki. Finally, he asked, “Any ideas?”

Jenna shook her head in amusement. “You've rejected all the solutions I can think of.”

Without waiting for her companions to speak, she said thoughtfully, “Ciel, put yourself in Loki's shoes. Think of yourself as someone who likes to tease others. Think of everything that happened from their perspective and see if you can find any clues. Don't you also like pranks? You should have something in common with them.”

My pranks are quite different from theirs... Lumian didn't say it out loud. He tried to recall his motives, thoughts, and changes in mentality during the pranks to analyze the actions and motives of the April Fool's team.

After a moment, he furrowed his brow.

“All pranks are meant to bring joy when the target is embarrassed or suffers a blow. Those people used my sister as a target for pranks, but they can't confirm the final outcome, so it's difficult for them to obtain true joy...

“Similarly, how are they going to track Franca's movements and witness her tragic end by instigating her to explore the underground? You have to know that even if Franca never goes to the mysticism gathering again, she might have encountered an accident due to something else.”

The three people in the room pondered this question.

If a prankster failed to witness the end of a prank, they would lack a sense of accomplishment and the expected joy. How could Loki and the others determine Aurore or Franca's encounter?

After a while, Lumian said in a deep voice, “Either the prank is a cover-up, and they have an ulterior motive, or they have a way to monitor the corresponding target.”

Franca suddenly felt a chill down her spine and subconsciously surveyed the room.

“What way?” Jenna asked on her behalf.

Lumian shook his head slowly. “I don't know. This might be a lead.”

Amidst the alternations between silence and discussion, the three of them couldn't come up with an answer, so they could only put this matter aside for the time being.

On his way back to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian gazed at the afternoon sun and probed, “Temiboros, can I find Loki through the Prophecy Spell?”

Termiboros's magnificent voice resounded, “After you left Rue Ancienne, if you hadn't done any anti-tracking, you would have encountered Loki.”

Chapter 382 Seizing the Opportunity

If I hadn't used anti-tracking, I would have encountered Loki? Lumian was taken aback by Termiboros's response.

All he wanted to know was whether the Prophecy Spell would work against Seer pathway Beyonders. It didn't matter if Termiboros answered or not. As a Contractee, he could answer his own question and acquire a bottle of Prophetic Concoction to test its effects. To his surprise, the Inevitability angel did provide an answer.

Lumian's mind raced as he dissected the information in that sentence.

After leaving Rue Ancienne, Loki had been tailing him for some time!

The source of the copied information had been a trap!

This noon, Loki had been at the Alone Bar!

He deliberately chose the Alone Bar's mechanical typewriter to make a copy of the information. His plan was that anyone chasing him would discover it, allowing him to start tracking the other party, aiming for a lethal strike.

And if the pursuer turned out to be formidable, he could ensure his basic safety by being inside Bureau 8's stronghold. He wouldn't be easily discovered. He could even manipulate Bureau 8, an official organization, to go after the other party.

With this in mind, Lumian felt a mixture of regret and relief.

Regrettably, he hadn't spotted Loki's pursuit after leaving Rue Ancienne until the anti-tracking process was finished. This meant he had "missed" the founder of the April Fool's team. He could have had the chance to discuss Muggle-related matters with him.

But Lumian was also relieved because he wasn't prepared. If he had discovered Loki and was forced to act prematurely, there was a high chance he would have met a tragic end. After all, according to Franca's description, a Sequence 7 Magician possessed many bizarre abilities. As a Marionettist, they could silently eliminate others.

If Loki had launched a surprise attack, Lumian wasn't sure if he would have had the opportunity to use Mr. K's finger. He also wasn't sure if he could have located the real Loki in time and escaped with the Spell of Harrumph.

However, at this moment, regret outweighed relief in his heart.

Lumian's pace toward Salle de Bal Brise involuntarily slowed. He recalled his experience at the Alone Bar at noon.

The bar was dimly lit, and it was well past lunchtime. Besides a couple of inebriated patrons chatting by the window, Leah, disguised as a bartender, appeared to be the only one on the first floor.

From the cellar, which doubled as a marionette theater, he could occasionally hear conversations from different people.

In the room with the mechanical typewriter, a man was reading a newspaper. He remained silent, his gaze fixed on the newspaper. Even when collecting the typing fee, he merely nodded...

Which one of them was Loki? Lumian stopped diagonally across from Salle de Bal Brise, his gaze unfocused.

Clearly, Leah couldn't be Loki. It wasn't due to gender differences but rather her lack of Sequence. According to Franca, Loki had a habit of revealing his appearance as of last year or even earlier. It was suspected that he had advanced to Faceless, and Leah was only a Sequence 7 Magician a few months ago.

In the lifelike dream, she likely couldn't conceal her specific Sequence.

Lumian's suspicion gradually settled on the man who was engrossed in reading the newspaper and watching the typewriter.

He has the ability to use the mechanical typewriter to duplicate information at will. It would be easy for him to notice if any strangers borrowed the typewriter...

Lumian carefully recalled the man's appearance and realized he was entirely unremarkable. He was in his thirties, with black hair, blue eyes, and an average appearance, dressed in a plain black suit like any common clerk.

Moreover, a Marionettist can create marionettes. The man might just be one of those marionettes, not Loki, which is why he remained silent and pretended to read the newspaper...

But if a Marionettist can control people, can they also turn rats, cockroaches, bedbugs, and other creatures into marionettes?

In that case, the possibilities are endless. Every living thing in the Alone Bar could potentially be Loki...

How could I ever hope to find him? What a vexing individual. Though his manifestations differed from those of the Amons, they are equally vexing!

It's only thanks to the angel trapped within me, Mr. Fool's seal, and the Blood Emperor's aura that I could evade a Marionettist—a Seer Beyond—so far. Relying solely on anti-tracking and Lie likely wouldn't be enough to escape Loki's grasp...

How frustrating. The Alone Bar is Bureau 8's stronghold. I can't simply flush the real Loki out with a broad sweep... The more Lumian contemplated it, the more exasperated he became.

Having successfully eluded pursuit, it seemed nearly impossible to bait Loki with a similar ploy. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence would smell a trap in this recurring situation.

What's worse, frequent visits to the Alone Bar would undoubtedly attract Bureau 8's attention, further complicating matters.

Lumian took a deep breath, exhaling slowly, forcing himself to regain his composure. He concentrated on his analysis of Loki.

According to Anthony's theory, Loki and most members of the April Fool's team have high opinions of themselves. Otherwise, after experiencing despair for the future, they wouldn't seek solace in pranks. They would indulge in their desires and the pleasures of life...

Is it possible to lure such a person into a trap they believe they had outsmarted?

Lumian dismantled and reassembled various pieces of information in his mind, searching for a viable solution.

His frustration grew, and he longed to storm into the Alone Bar and eliminate everyone except Leah.

Then, an idea struck Lumian.

While it might not form a direct plan against Loki, it could serve as a means to probe the situation at the Alone Bar, uncover exploitable details, and gather information. Additionally, it would provide an outlet for his emotions and anger, and perhaps even earn him some money.

After careful consideration, Lumian turned around and made his way towards Rue Anarchie.

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 401.

Lumian pushed open the unlatched door, where he found the bankrupt merchant, Fitz, sitting at a wooden table, dipping a long, stick-like rye bread into a thick, sticky soup.

Fitz glanced back, placing the food aside, and stood up, clearly confused and somewhat panicked.

“Monsieur Ciel, what's the matter?”

The bankrupt merchant's brown hair appeared greasy, yet he stubbornly maintained a semblance of tidiness. His dark-brown eyes and smile lines gave him a naturally ingratiating appearance.

In contrast to their previous encounter, Fitz's clothes now bore a bit of dirt, as if he hadn't had the time to clean them.

Lumian cut to the chase, his tone blunt.

“Can you provide evidence that Timmons owes you 100,000 verl d'or? The owner of Salle de Bal Unique.”

Fitz's eyes lit up.

“Yes! I have a contract for our joint venture. It clearly states that he agreed to repurchase his shares within a specified time frame, along with paying me 100,000 verl d'or and the corresponding profits.

“Monsieur Ciel, you don't need to use Salle de Bal Unique to jog my memory about Timmons. I curse that scoundrel a hundred times a day!

“Monsieur Ciel, do you believe there's a chance of recovering my money?”

Lumian's lips curled up.

“This could be your once-in-lifetime opportunity. If you miss it, you may never see that money again.”

Salle de Bal Unique was at its most vulnerable!

Without the Amons, it was now inhabited solely by humans with varying degrees of mutation!

Fitz was a mix of excitement and apprehension upon hearing this. He hastily retrieved the valuable contract and handed it over to Lumian.

While he didn't entirely trust the mob leader, he had no choice but to place his hopes in him, praying that Lumian would return with good news.

Quartier de l'Observatoire, Rue Ancienne.

Lumian changed his appearance and clothes. He walked towards Salle de Bal Unique in a shirt, vest, top hat, and thin formal suit.

He encountered a guard sporting a monocle on his right eye and dressed in a short black suit, who obstructed his path.

“Monsieur, you must wear a monocle to enter our dance hall.”

Lumian responded with a smile.

“Monette introduced me here. He mentioned that I don't need to wear a monocle on my right eye, like you gentlemen.”

The two guards exchanged meaningful glances and exchanged knowing smiles.

“Then it's not an issue.”

From their appearances, it seems they are well aware of the consequences of being invited by Monette. They might even have been influenced by Monette's devious personality and secretly are faithful to Amon. Unfortunately, they remain oblivious to the fact that Salle de Bal Unique is no longer the same as they remembered. Lumian sneered inwardly and decided to seek out someone most resembling Amon later, intent on shattering their monocle with a punch.

This act was both a release of his pent-up anger and fear from being manipulated and intimidated by Amon, and a means to catch the attention of the Alone Bar. After all, how would they know that someone could reclaim the money from Timmons?

It was already evening, and gas wall lamps and stained-glass chandeliers illuminated Salle de Bal Unique's dance hall.

Dancers in monocles and short suits swayed on the dance floor while others leaned against the railings with glasses of wine, wearing smiles as they observed others dancing. Musicians played violins and the clarinet in one corner, contributing to the lively atmosphere.

It appeared as though nothing unusual had occurred here.

After observing for a while, Lumian made his way to the stairs leading to the second floor.

The guard with a monocle, stationed at the top of the stairs, extended his right hand to block Lumian's path.

He asked with an inscrutable smile, “Who are you here to see?”

Lumian maintained a relaxed demeanor as he replied, “I'm here to collect some debts from Timmons.”

“Then you can't proceed upstairs,” the monocled guard retorted, his tone almost amused, as if he were witnessing a comedy.

Lumian's lips curled into a radiant smile.

Bang!

His left fist connected with the guard's face, sending the monocle flying. It crashed to the ground with a resounding crack.

Chapter 383 “Forced Storming”

Amidst the sound of the monocle falling and sliding, the guard tilted his head, surprise and confusion crossing his face.

His reaction was rather bizarre. He didn't react with anger or call for backup. It was as though he considered what had just happened a part of some performance filled with mystery.

Lumian passed by with a smile, heading up the stairs without a second glance.

The guard's expression flickered, but he eventually gave up trying to intervene.

Still filled with puzzlement and thought, his eyes darted around, and a strange, anticipatory grin played on his lips, as if he expected something thrilling.

As Lumian reached the second floor, the two guards with monocles simply watched him pass without hindrance. They wore similar enigmatic and expectant smiles.

No Low-Sequence Beyonders? Lumian muttered, disappointed.

He had braced himself for a confrontation, something to showcase for the Alone Bar across the street. But, to his surprise, the other fake Amons in the Salle de Bal Unique were just regular folks. None of them seemed inclined to engage with him.

It made sense, though. Amon wasn't like Mr. Fool or the Great Mother, capable of granting large-scale boons to believers. As for the Low- and Mid-Sequence Beyonders, they had likely been dealt with. In the undetectable angelic struggle, they might have been eliminated.

The remaining individuals probably had no idea that the dance hall had turned unusual, and many of their colleagues had vanished without a trace. They likely believed that Lumian was about to join them or go mad from some sort of prank.

With no imposter Amon to confront, Lumian had no option but to improvise and enact the situation himself.

He pulled his revolver from its holster and nonchalantly fired at the rooms on both sides of the corridor.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Each bullet hit a window with precision, the shattering glass echoing through the hall, accompanied by gunshots.

The second-floor guards were both surprised and perplexed by Lumian's actions. They suspected that he had been repeatedly fooled by a coworker, leading to a mental breakdown.

Otherwise, why would he be taking on the air and windows?

Instinctively, the guards raised their right hands to adjust their monocles in their eyes. Their expressions became increasingly eager, as if they were anticipating the climax of this thriller.

Go, confront the iceberg beneath the sea and the fear lurking in the darkness!

After firing four shots, Lumian reached the largest office.

He pushed the slightly ajar door open and found a man seated behind a massive wooden desk.

The man had a wide forehead and narrow cheeks. His dark, slightly curly hair framed his face, and his light-blue eyes seemed unfocused.

He also sported a crystal-like monocle over his right eye and wore a loose, comfortable black robe.

“Timmons?” Lumian inquired, entering with a furrowed brow.

The man snapped out of his daze and responded with a sense of disappointment, as if he had lost something precious.

“I’m Timmons.”

“You’re not dead yet?” Lumian asked, both surprised and amused.

As far as he knew, the other members of Salle de Bal Unique were in a state of being Amon and not Amon. However, Timmons, the boss here, must have been deeply parasitized. Such a person should have perished in the angelic-level battle, losing his life.

But that wasn’t the case.

Timmons glanced at Lumian, maintaining the frustration and emptiness of someone who had lost their soul.

“Many people wish me dead, but they don’t seem to have the power to curse me.

“Perhaps I’m already dead. All that’s left is a shell.”

“That’s not important. What matters is that you return my client’s 110,000 verl d’or, along with the interest,” Lumian stated as he retrieved the contract from his satchel with his left hand, courtesy of the bankrupt merchant, Fitz.

He anticipated Timmons’ rejection of his request and an ensuing confrontation.

Timmons shook off his despondency, raised a hand to his forehead, and smiled.

“There’s cash and accessories in the safe. Help yourself. The password is 010103.”

“I thought you’d put up a fight.” Lumian sighed in disappointment.

Timmons gazed at the revolver in Lumian’s hand and remarked, “I’m just a swindler, not a miser. I can swindle others again when I’m out of money. But if I’m dead, there’s nothing left.

“Besides, I’ve already lost the most important thing today. Compared to that, 110,000 verl d’or is nothing.”

What do you mean you can swindle others if you're out of money? Haven't you ever considered becoming wealthy through legal means? Lumian pursed his lips and made his way towards the mechanical safe in the office.

Three, two, one... As he approached the safe, he counted down, expecting Timmons to launch a surprise attack from behind.

Yet, the owner of Salle de Bal Unique remained motionless. He didn't cry out for help or attempt to summon the police.

Lumian crouched in front of the iron-gray mechanical safe. Using the password provided by Timmons, he twisted the knob repeatedly until he heard a satisfying click.

He glanced at the banknotes and gold bars that clearly exceeded 100,000 verl d'or, opened his satchel, and collected them all.

With that task completed, Lumian raised his revolver, shattered the office window, and climbed out.

Timmons's lips curled into a playful smile, one shared by everyone present.

However, at that moment, Lumian unexpectedly spun around and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

A yellow bullet grazed Timmons's hair and embedded itself into a cabinet nearby.

The monocle-wearing Timmons's body tensed, and his smile disappeared. His eyes were filled with bewilderment.

He even caught a whiff of something burning above his head.

Lumian grinned and waved his hand.

“Surprised?”

With that, he leaped off the windowsill and landed in the alley behind Salle de Bal Unique.

Timmons's expression gradually shifted, now marked by confusion and bewilderment.

Inside Salle de Bal Unique, the dancers with monocles on their right eyes and short suits went about their business, eagerly awaiting the intruder's descent, imagining him donning a monocle and officially joining their ranks.

However, amid the intermittent gunshots, they failed to witness the spectacle they had anticipated.

Near Place du Purgatoire in Rue Ancienne, there was a bell tower belonging to the Eternal Blazing Sun Cathedral. Adjacent to the bell tower stood a newly constructed ten-story building.

Franca, disguised as a typical female mercenary, positioned herself at the rooftop's edge with a brass telescope, her gaze fixed on the Alone Bar in the distance.

Amidst the distant echoes of gunshots, Leah, the bartender clad in a white shirt, black bow tie, and a dark knee-length dress, emerged at the bar's entrance, her eyes directed towards Salle de Bal Unique, situated diagonally across from her.

Before long, Franca observed gray rats emerging from beside Leah's feet. These rats crossed the street and disappeared beside the ancient building.

After another two to three minutes, a man and a woman exited the Alone Bar, pushing their way through the guards and entering Salle de Bal Unique.

Franca scrutinized the pair through her telescope and noticed that their expressions seemed animated and their movements agile when they “interacted” with the guards. However, as they crossed the street and passed by the guards, their expressions grew stiffer, and their movements became somewhat robotic.

Marionettes? Franca speculated.

As for the whereabouts of the Marionettist who created and controlled these marionettes, she couldn't discern it at all. The only thing she could deduce was that the effective range of this ability spanned dozens of meters, if not more.

Simultaneously, she couldn't help but complain, When there are people, they appear as ‘real people.’ But when there's nobody around, the Marionettist can't be bothered to maintain their facial expressions and character details? Isn't this too unprofessional?

Or perhaps it's a tactic to intimidate occasional onlookers and passersby who happen to catch a glimpse?

Franca maintained her vigil until Lumian had returned to his original form, changed his attire, and completed his anti-tracking measures. Even then, she couldn't spot the Marionettist when he met up with her.

Other than Leah, everyone else appeared to be marionettes!

Franca conveyed her frustration to Lumian, “Isn't this level of caution and meticulousness excessive? I couldn't find anything conclusive. All I can confirm is that there's definitely a Marionettist here, and it's highly likely that there's more than one.”

Just hearing her account made Lumian's head ache, much like when dealing with Amon.

Could it be that they became “neighbors” because they excelled at concealing their true forms and were exceptionally elusive and hard to uncover?

“Is there no way to use Magic Mirror Divination to gather some clues?” Lumian pondered briefly before inquiring.

Franca gently shook her head in response.

“This is the Seer pathway. Unless I can directly possess one of the marionettes, I won't be able to locate their true bodies.”

Lumian fell silent as he gazed at the now tranquil Salle de Bal Unique.

“Let's head back. At the next gathering, we'll gather information from I Know Someone, Hisoka, and Bard. They shouldn't be as elusive as Loki. We can still pretend to be duped and see if we can draw them out.”

When the time came, Hidden Blade couldn't step forward; Muggle would have to handle it herself. Franca had already purchased a copy of Loki's information and was among the potential suspects.

“Agreed,” Franca concurred, realizing that this was their best course of action.

The two of them promptly departed from the high-rise apartment and secured a four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage.

As the carriage reached the intersection between Quartier de l'Observatoire and Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Franca turned to Lumian.

“Aren't you going to perform another anti-tracking procedure?”

“Wouldn't relying on your anti-divination skills be sufficient?” Lumian responded with a smile. “Besides, after leaving Salle de Bal Unique, I've already undertaken several anti-tracking measures.”

Franca stared at him for a couple of seconds before letting out a resigned sigh.

“Fine.”

Avenue du Marché, market district.

Lumian, carrying a satchel filled with banknotes and gold, said his goodbyes to Franca and proceeded towards Rue Anarchie. Franca, on the other hand, headed back to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Rue Anarchie was as lively and crowded as ever. Lumian weaved his way through vendors and pedestrians, drawing closer to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Suddenly, he experienced an unsettling sensation. His body seemed to lose coordination, as if someone had injected glue into his joints.

Chapter 384 Stagnation

Not good! Lumian was both a Hunter and a Dancer, and his mastery over his body was amazing. Any unfamiliar or abnormal situation immediately triggered his instincts, alerting him to potential danger.

But in that critical moment, his thoughts seemed to slow down, shrouded in a dense fog. Each idea froze, demanding tremendous effort to clear.

I've been attacked...

Loki is really... here...

Is this... the performance... of a Marionettist's abilities?

As it nears the end... I won't be able... to think... Will I... become his... marionette?

My sense of danger... is clouded...

Dammit... Termination boros, it's impossible... that you didn't notice... the changes in my fate... You didn't... warn me...

Did He intentionally tell me... that Loki... nearly tracked me... to make me do it again?

Me becoming Loki's... puppet... aids... Him in escaping... the seal?

I can't just... wait like this... I must resist with all my might...

Where is... Loki...?

In these fragmented thoughts, Lumian strained to move. His hand found its way into his pocket, and he surveyed his surroundings with stiffness.

Previously, he and Franca had discussed the limitations of the Marionettist's power. They agreed that it must have a certain range or require proximity. Otherwise, it would exceed the capabilities of a Sequence 5 and only be within the realm of a saint who had transcended into godhood. Those from different pathways that Franca knew couldn't resist it at all.

The duo believed that this ability either required a certain medium or could only be activated at a close distance. Just like the Ring of Punishment's Psychic Piercing, it could only be effective if the distance between them was reduced to five meters.

Lumian suspected Loki was hiding nearby in the crowd, perhaps no more than ten meters away.

What greeted his eyes were street vendors and passersby. Some of their faces were familiar, while others were unfamiliar. They were no different from usual.

In his haste, Lumian couldn't discern Loki among them. Adding to the challenge, Loki was a Faceless, skilled in transformation and disguise.

As Lumian continued his search for Loki, a crimson flame manifested in his left palm.

His motives were twofold: first, to test his ability to resist a Marionettist's control and invasion by inflicting pain upon himself, and second, to set a question and observe how Loki would respond. By studying Loki's reactions, he hoped to glean insights into Loki's exact whereabouts and weaknesses in his marionette-making abilities.

But just as the searing pain coursed through his mind, Lumian heard a distinct snap.

Instantly, the crimson flame in his palm dissipated into a harmless stream of light, unable to form anything explosive.

Lumian spun around, trying to identify the source of the snapping of fingers.

However, his joints had become encased in a sticky "glue," and his movements grew increasingly rigid and sluggish.

This delay caused him to turn a second slower than he intended. Everyone within his line of sight appeared normal, and he couldn't pinpoint who had snapped their fingers.

Marionettist... is indeed capable... of Flame Controlling...

Pain... doesn't... help much... in the slowdown of my thoughts... and stiffening of my body... It only... marginally... increased... my reaction speed...

I can't... waste time... on such matters... The most important thing... now... is to find... Loki. Otherwise... whether I use... the Spell of Harrumph... summon Mr. K... or wait for... Franca to save me... wouldn't... significantly change... the situation...

I wonder... if spirit world traversal... can be used... If... the next... two or three attempts... fail... I'll... give it a try... and see if I can teleport out... of a Marionettist's... ability range...

Lumian's thoughts grew increasingly sluggish, but they weren't to the point where he couldn't think, react, or dodge any attack.

Soon, with his rich combat experience, he came up with an idea.

From the... current situation... a Marionettist... indeed needs... to be at close range... to gradually transform... their target... into a marionette...

In that... case... I'll make sure... there's no one... or animals... within a ten-meter... radius!

Whoever... lingers... within the Inferno Hell... shall be Loki!

Once Lumian understood the situation, he immediately opened his mouth and shouted, "There... is... a... fire!"

Crimson flames surged from Lumian's body as he finished his staccato sentence.

With his feet as the center, they spread out, igniting the fruit peels and litter on the ground.

Alerted by Lumian's warning, nearby street vendors and pedestrians swiftly gathered their belongings and fled toward the ends of Rue Anarchie upon seeing the rising flames.

Seeing their hasty retreat, Lumian's sluggish smile emerged.

Yes, you can use Flame Controlling, but I'm not going to do any delicate maneuvers now. My only move is to constantly ignite the surrounding things and increase the variety of fire sources!

Moreover, this will inevitably draw the attention of official Beyonders!

Crimson flames expanded in all directions, resembling a vibrant ocean gradually consuming the earth.

Despite his faltering gaze, Lumian still managed to catch a glimpse of a figure flickering within the flames—a figure with black hair, blue eyes, and an ordinary face, blending in with the crowd of clerks on the road.

After bidding Lumian farewell, Franca made her way toward Rue des Blouses Blanches.

However, her journey took an unexpected turn as she suddenly veered into an alley, disappearing into the shadows.

This Demoness of Pleasure began to stealthily make her way toward Rue Anarchie.

This was her prior agreement with Lumian.

If their initial plan of barging into Salle de Bal Unique failed to provoke the Beyonders in the Alone Bar or have them reveal themselves, they had a backup plan—a kind of "fishing" expedition after leaving Rue Ancienne to see if they could "encounter" their target.

Franca's earlier inquiry about Lumian's intention to engage in counter-tracking was essentially confirming if they should stick to their original strategy. Lumian's response had been affirmative.

As Franca approached Rue Anarchie, she retrieved a mirror from the shadows.

This mirror was a Mirror Substitution, crafted using Lumian's blood and hair!

While it couldn't be used as a substitute for death or injury at this distance, it had a profound mystical connection to the original body. It could be employed to monitor Lumian's general condition.

In simple terms, if the mirror were to suddenly shatter, it would signal that Lumian had met his demise. If it displayed a few deep cracks, it would indicate that Lumian had suffered severe injuries.

Likewise, Franca had placed a Mirror Substitution on Lumian. This precaution was taken because they were uncertain whom Loki might target after their separation. They had no choice but to conceal themselves in the shadows and continue their activities. Through Mirror Substitution, they could keep tabs on each other's well-being and provide timely assistance.

This method was more reliable than attempting to discern changes in luck, as Loki possessed formidable anti-divination abilities and could manipulate fate after making decisions.

Franca, deep in her stealthy advancement, was suddenly alerted as the mirror in her hand grew icy cold.

Utilizing her Dark Vision, she pierced through the shadows and witnessed the mirror's transformation into a lifeless gray, as if it had rusted or been submerged in the depths of an icy lake.

Ciel is under attack? Franca's heart tightened as she quickened her pace.

Upon reaching Rue Anarchie, she was met with the sight of spreading flames. Within the crimson inferno, a figure flickered intermittently. Occasionally, it opened its mouth, producing a sharp bang.

It sounded like a real gunshot, causing vendors and pedestrians to scatter in fear, believing a violent gunfight between the mobs was unfolding.

Lumian, on the other hand, struggled to evade the attacks, but he failed twice. The Air Bullets grazed his body, leaving noticeable wounds.

However, it was clear that the figure didn't truly intend to harm him. It seemed more concerned about the potential complications that injuries might cause before a specific juncture.

Relieved that Lumian was relatively unscathed, Franca retreated into the shadows and approached the battlefield cautiously. As she drew nearer, she retrieved a mirror and,

disengaging from the shadows, directed the mirror toward the clusters of flames. Her right hand became enshrouded in zero-temperature black flames.

When the figure appeared in the mirror's reflection, Franca swiftly ran her right hand across the mirror's surface.

Silently, the figure burst into pitch-black flames.

He swiftly thinned and shrank, transforming into an intricately cut paper figurine.

Among the crowd, roughly ten to twenty meters away, an unusually ordinary-looking man clad in a black suit emerged.

Lumian's thoughts snapped back to full speed, and his body shook off the stiffness that had hindered him.

In a flash, he vanished from his previous position and reappeared just seven meters away from the suspected Loki.

Lumian then exclaimed, "Hmph!"

A brilliant beam of white light shot forth from his nostrils, targeting the ordinary-looking man with black hair and blue eyes.

Simultaneously, Franca acted in perfect coordination. She conjured a transparent ice spear and hurled it toward their target.

Upon piercing the ground, white frost rapidly spread from the impact, chilling those nearby and causing their bodies to stiffen.

At that very moment, a thin-faced passerby with brown hair and brown eyes interposed himself between Lumian and the suspected Loki, intercepting the white beam created by Lumian.

He appeared unharmed, his blank eyes gazing upwards as he began to sing an aria.

“Oh, my Sun!”

In an instant, it was as if a blinding sun had risen within the minds of Lumian, Franca, and others nearby, rendering their thoughts sluggish.

Instinctively, the duo moved to evade, with one either retreating into the shadows while encasing herself in a crystalline and resilient frost or rolling to the side of the road and using the Niese Face to alter his appearance.

When the intense sunlight eventually receded, they found that both the man suspected to be Loki and the “passerby” singing the aria had vanished into thin air.

Fearful glances from vendors and passersby were directed their way. Those closest to the spectacle had shut their eyes tightly, tears streaming down their faces.

Chapter 385 Before and After Comparison

Lumian swiftly assessed the surroundings, taking in the scattered gas street lamps and their flickering crimson flames. In the distance, figures moved about cautiously, but none dared to draw near. The individuals up ahead couldn't even open their eyes due to the blinding glare of the “sun.”

In this situation, whether it was the suspected Loki or the “passerby” who had sung that aria, there was no sign of either of them.

“Son of a sow, did they just vanish into thin air?” Lumian couldn't help but curse under his breath, his anxiety and anger mounting.

Had they fled without even engaging in a proper battle?

Did they disengage once a single strike failed?

“Dammit, were you born in the year of the rat? Slippery as eels, and they vanish at the drop of a hat!” Franca cursed as she approached Lumian, using a peculiar phrase that seemed like a translation. “The Seer and Marauder pathways are truly interchangeable. Their styles are too damn similar, aren't they?”

This was primarily evident in their inability to strike or capture the primary target.

The key difference was that the Seer pathway started behaving this way from Sequence 7, while the Marauder pathway might have to wait until they reached Sequence 4 to exhibit such traits.

Lumian's mind raced as he pondered how to track down Loki and his marionette.

Perhaps they had already made their escape, or maybe they were lurking somewhere in the evening streets of Rue Anarchie!

A marionette...

Yes, that arising marionette had taken my Spell of Harrumph head-on without flinching. That suggests there's a high chance it's already dead. No active, conscious Spirit Body...

My near-transformation into a marionette confirms this indirectly...

If the marionette is dead, it probably doesn't possess the fate of a living being. No so-called luck. Even if there is, it's locked in darkness. That spells death...

If we can't locate Loki, who possesses Faceless powers, maybe we can start with his marionette!

With this plan in mind, Lumian concentrated, carefully observing the destiny of the people standing more than ten to twenty meters away.

He scanned everything that had a destiny and wasn't shrouded in darkness.

After a rapid survey, Lumian couldn't identify any potential marionette targets.

He let out a slow, disappointed sigh.

"Let's get out of here. The firefighters are on their way. Official Beyonders should be arriving soon," Franca warned Lumian.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and left Rue Anarchie before the crimson flames could be extinguished.

His intention was to take a circuitous route back to Auberge du Coq Doré. There, he would return the scammed funds he had obtained from Salle de Bal Unique to the bankrupt merchant, Fitz, and claim his share as agreed.

After taking a dozen steps, Lumian suddenly remembered Monsieur Ruhr, who had succumbed to illness, and Madame Michel, who had hanged herself while singing the Capital of Joy.

He feared that he might unwittingly bring a catastrophe involving Beyonder powers to Auberge du Coq Doré and his trustee, Fitz.

Aurore had portrayed despicable and deranged criminals in two of her novels. They relished beginning their torment with those their targets held dear, forcing them to witness the tragic deaths of their friends one by one.

As the leader of April Fool's, Loki took pleasure in manipulating others' minds. He had no qualms about harming his comrades, let alone murdering innocent people he had never met. Therefore, the likelihood was high that he would commence with Lumian's acquaintances and employ their deaths to shatter Lumian's psyche. He would secretly revel in watching Lumian descend into madness before seizing the opportunity to end his life.

Though it was only a possibility, Lumian refused to take the risk. He halted and turned towards Avenue du Marché.

"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, her expression one of confusion.

Having regained his composure, Lumian flashed a reassuring smile and replied, "Let's grab a drink at Salle de Bal Brise."

The fate of the mobsters he frequently associated with was of lesser concern. Mobsters knew they had to be prepared for such eventualities!

Franca was momentarily taken aback but quickly grasped Lumian's underlying worry.

Loki had hooked a big fish but failed to capture it. It was clear he had seen through their true appearances. He could hide in the shadows and wait for the perfect moment. As for Lumian and herself, unless they abandoned their current identities and used their anti-divination and anti-tracking abilities to survive elsewhere, they would be left in a state of constant suspicion, fearing that any rat they saw might attack them.

Compared to Auberge du Coq Doré, the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise offered a quieter and more defensible location.

Furthermore, in the event of a Beyonder-level confrontation, it was better to involve mobsters rather than innocent bystanders.

"I'll change my attire as well," Franca hinted, indicating her desire to alter her appearance and remain hidden in the shadows, making it difficult for Loki to locate her and launch any potential attacks.

Similarly, she intended to have Jenna return home and stay with her brother for a while to avoid becoming collateral damage.

In the face of such a bizarre and terrifying adversary, the survivability of an Instigator remained too fragile.

Lumian gently patted the concealed Franca's Mirror Substitution hidden beneath his clothing with his right hand, signaling the need for them to watch each other's backs.

Franca nodded solemnly, affirming her understanding of the situation.

Salle de Bal Brise, the café on the second floor.

Lumian settled at the far end near the window and turned to his bodyguard, Sarkota.

"Go to Auberge du Coq Doré and fetch a bankrupt merchant named Fitz."

With such an intermediary, Fitz would appear to have achieved his objectives through his association with the Savoie Mob, and there was no direct connection to Ciel Dubois. If Loki intended to select a victim, he would likely focus on the Savoie Mob members affiliated with Lumian.

With the weighty satchel resting on his lap, Lumian patiently awaited Fitz's arrival while contemplating the Loki-related issues at hand.

Having lost track of the April Fool's leader, Lumian was left with only certain phenomena to guide him in this matter.

One of the details was an option Lumian had predetermined before taking action.

If Loki had indeed taken the bait, why did I manage to elude this April Fool's leader's tracking abilities using anti-tracking techniques in my previous encounter but not this time?

Upon leaving Salle de Bal Unique, Lumian had intentionally followed the same anti-tracking procedures as before. He reverted to his original appearance, changed his clothing, and modified his satchel. However, as he traversed Rue Ancienne again and reunited with Franca, he refrained from employing any anti-tracking measures. This was done to establish a comparative sample and identify any discrepancies.

After all, if he failed to capture the bizarre and seemingly unkillable Loki, his efforts would be in vain.

He needed to gain something valuable from this encounter.

This was a smaller trap concealed within a larger one.

Logically, if my anti-tracking procedures had shaken off Loki previously, there should be no reason for an exception this time. I had meticulously paid attention to the people and creatures around me, even avoiding the watchful eyes of birds in the sky. Even if a mere insect became one of Loki's marionettes, it would struggle to keep up with my swiftness...

Therefore, either Franca had been targeted early in the morning, or Loki recognized me when I passed through Rue Ancienne again after my anti-tracking.

Franca carried out anti-divination procedures and was a distance away from the Alone Bar and Salle de Bal Unique. She didn't even enter Rue Ancienne and had used non-mystical methods to observe. It's unlikely that she'll be exposed so quickly unless Loki was aware from the outset that such an observer would be present...

The likeliest scenario was that Loki had recognized me when I passed through Rue Ancienne again after my anti-tracking procedures. But how had this recognition occurred? I had reverted to my original appearance, altered my clothing, and even chosen to pass through in a rented carriage to avoid suspicion. According to Anthony, this should have concealed my unchanged leather shoes from prying eyes and hidden my typical gait and body language...

I had even applied cologne to mask my original scent...

What unique characteristics do I possess that allows Loki to discern my identity within such a brief period?

Lumian compared the differences and gradually arrived at a hypothesis.

Either a Marionettist or one of his marionettes possesses the ability to directly identify a person at the level of their soul, consciousness, or some other aspect, or Loki can perceive distinctive traits that set me apart from others—such as Inevitability's angel, Mr. Fool's seal, or the Blood Emperor's aura?

Although Lie belongs to the Seer pathway, it does not have a readily detectable convergence force that corresponds to Loki's Sequence...

The more Lumian pondered, the more convinced he became that Loki had a means of piercing his disguise, but his tracking abilities were limited. A vigilant target who remained wary of strangers, animals, birds, and insects while being impossible to carry out any direct divination would successfully evade him.

Regardless of how Loki told him apart, this was the best explanation when carrying out the before-and-after comparison.

With this in mind, Lumian had a new idea.

Lumian's lips curled slightly as he cast his gaze toward the dark night sky.

Fifteen minutes later, Fitz, the bankrupt merchant, was brought into the café by Sarkota

Lumian signaled for Sarkota to step aside momentarily and addressed Fitz, "I've already recovered the money. How much do you think you should receive?"

As he spoke, Lumian emptied the banknotes, gold coins, and valuable accessories onto the table, his eyes briefly scanning over them.

"About 130,000 verl d'or in total."

Fitz blurted out, "60,000, no, 50,000. No, just give me 30,000 verl d'or."

With a smile, Lumian separated a few bundles of neatly bound banknotes and tossed them to Fitz.

"As we agreed, the interest belongs to me, and I'll take 50% of the principal. Here's 50,000 verl d'or."

Fitz accepted the money with gratitude, expressing his heartfelt thanks.

While he didn't receive the full amount, 50,000 verl d'or was a substantial sum that would enable him to start anew with hope in his heart.

50% of the principal along with interest was a fair arrangement!

Lumian was equally pleased. Through the operation facilitated by the Angel of Time by Mr. Fool's side, he had effortlessly gained 50,000 verl d'or in banknotes and 30,000 gold coins.

After all, he had worked so hard to gather gold, but in the end, he only accumulated 75,000 gold.

Deep in thought, he contemplated the idea of purchasing sacrificial offerings from the corresponding domain as a token of gratitude to Mr. Fool and the Angel of Time.

After waiting for over half an hour, Lumian ascended to the bedroom on the second floor. He discarded his satchel and employed Lie to alter his appearance once more, assuming the likeness of a male Aurore with black hair and brown eyes.

He changed into a shirt, vest, trousers, and leather boots, stowed away Lie, and transferred the Flog boxing gloves into his briefcase. He carefully surveyed the scene beyond the window.

Once he confirmed that no humans, rats, or birds were in the vicinity, Lumian pushed open the window and gracefully leaped out, seemingly unaware that Loki might possess the ability to see through his disguise.

Chapter 386 Caution

In the dark and deserted back alley,

Lumian carefully navigated the maze of discarded refuse infested with rats and cockroaches. His movements were deliberate, alternating between rapid dashes and cautious steps, sudden changes in direction, and even a few circles, as if he were evading an unseen pursuer.

Finally, he arrived at Rue des Blouses Blanches and entered the seemingly “abandoned” safe house, whose lease had not yet expired.

Following a process, he pulled the heavy curtains shut and meticulously inspected every corner of the room.

Compared to before, he not only eradicated the bedbugs and routed the rats but he also left no room for tiny, rice-grain-sized flying insects. He demanded absolute cleanliness.

With that done, Lumian seated himself at the table. He smoothed out a sheet of paper and began to write.

“Honorable Madame Hela,

“When I took part in the April Fool's team discussion masquerading as my sister, Muggle, I couldn't help but notice the peculiar reactions of Hisoka, Mad Lady, Bard, and Ultraman upon Muggle's unexpected return after her prolonged absence. I suspect ‘I Know Someone’ was the psychiatrist Muggle sought in her final moments.

“Simultaneously, they were collaborating with Loki in a ruse, hoping to entice members from other teams to embark on a subterranean quest for the remains of the Ancient Sun God.

“I believe Loki is the de facto leader of April Fool's. If there's anything awry with the others, it undoubtedly concerns him as well. Consequently, I acquired a copy of the Ancient Sun God's information from him and enlisted divination services to examine the mechanical typewriter responsible for producing the text. It happened at the Alone Bar on Rue Ancienne in Trier Quartier de l'Observatoire.

“Following some field investigation, it became apparent that this locale serves as the stronghold for Bureau 8. However, Loki appears to have set his sights on me. I was assaulted in the evening and narrowly escaped becoming his marionette. My escape, though, exposed my true identity to him.

“As I write this letter, I find myself in the safe house I had previously prepared. Nevertheless, I can't be certain whether I have eluded Loki's pursuit.

“I strongly suspect there's something amiss with him. If left unchecked, he could pose a grave threat to the Research Society in the days ahead.

“I hope to receive your assistance.”

Lumian felt no shame in laying out his intentions plainly.

His plan was to make himself the bait that would draw Loki out of hiding, while Hela, with her ability to harness Concealment, would lurk in the shadows, ready to deliver the decisive blow to the leader of April Fool's.

Perhaps only Hela, with her superior Sequence and mastery of Concealment, had a chance of evading detection and discovering the true body of their bizarre and unkillable adversary.

After folding the letter, Lumian swiftly arranged the altar and summoned the pure silver skull adorned with pale-white flames in its eye sockets.

Franca stealthily made her way back to Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. She used her persuasive abilities to convince Jenna to temporarily vacate the premises for a couple of days.

Only after Jenna repeatedly confirmed that she would be of no assistance did she reluctantly give up her facade of bravery, departing amidst a string of curses.

Quickly, Franca changed into different attire and donned the disguise props she had acquired from Rentas, a member of the Bliss Society, transforming her appearance entirely.

As she applied makeup, she couldn't help but curse fate's mother.

Dammit, I shouldn't have let Jenna go so soon! She's much better at handling these things than me, and her makeup skills are superior.

Such skills were fundamental for an apprentice actress.

With a simple disguise in place, Franca seamlessly shifted between invisibility and concealment within the shadows, weaving her way through the market district.

She made a concerted effort to thwart any attempts at divination and employed anti-tracking techniques learned from Lumian.

Finally, she returned to Rue des Blouses Blanches and entered Building 6.

This was the safe house she had prepared for herself, conveniently overlooking her original residence.

Phew... Franca, having completed all the procedures, heaved a sigh of relief and lay down in the Loen-style recliner.

Simultaneously, she muttered to herself, I've only known Ciel for less than three months. Why does it feel like I've experienced more in this time than in the past year...

Is this guy some sort of jinx reincarnate?

In the secure confines of the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches, Lumian patiently waited for nearly fifteen minutes. Then, from the abrupt darkness, the pure silver skull's head emerged, clutching a simple folded letter in its skeletal teeth.

"Thank you," Lumian replied habitually, accepting the letter.

If Hela was unwilling to engage with a suspected member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian had no choice but to abandon his current plan and swiftly locate Franca. He would guide her through spirit world traversal to distant locales like the hill district, Quartier Éraste, and other suburbs before returning.

He felt that it was the only way to evade Loki's pursuit or lock-on. Moving openly was out of the question unless he shifted to an entirely different area.

Lumian unfolded the paper and discovered that Hela's response was succinct: "Got it."

A wry smile curled at the corners of Lumian's mouth as he conjured crimson flames from his hand, igniting the reply.

Without delay, he restored the table's surface to its ordinary state and reverted to his original appearance, aided by the Lie earring.

Next, Lumian extinguished the carbide lamp and reclined on the bed, closing his eyes and feigning slumber.

As minutes slipped away, night settled in, and Rue des Blouses Blanches descended into stillness.

The crimson moonlight filtered through heavy curtains, casting a subdued, eerie glow within the room.

After an indeterminate span of time, a small, grayish-black figure emerged from a concealed crevice in the corner—a nondescript rat.

Soundlessly and stealthily, the rat approached the table, ascending its surface. It moved about with deliberate intent, as if surveying its territory for any signs of intrusion.

After a brief inspection, it halted its actions and retreated into the shadowy corners untouched by the dim moonlight. Its body now faced the bed.

The rat fixated its gaze upon Lumian with an unnervingly human-like intensity.

It appeared to meld with the darkness, assuming a statue-like stillness, completely immobile and unwavering in its focus on Lumian.

Nearly ten minutes passed, and faint, nearly imperceptible footsteps echoed from the corridor outside the apartment.

Tap, tap, tap. The footsteps drew nearer.

Abruptly, the footsteps vanished as if they had never been or had come to a standstill at some unseen juncture.

The rat retreated from the shadowy realm untouched by the crimson moonlight, traversing the table and vanishing through the same crevice it had emerged from.

With swiftness, it disappeared, leaving the room in an even deeper silence, broken only by the faint sound of Lumian's slow, rhythmic breathing.

Lumian didn't open his eyes. His body was very relaxed, as if he had truly fallen asleep.

6 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in an apartment.

Franca reclined in the recliner, swaying back and forth with the chair.

Troubled, she pondered what to do next. With such a bizarre and terrifying foe lurking in the shadows, the constant sense of being watched had left her restless, and she couldn't find solace whether sitting or standing.

I need to resolve this quickly. One can be a thief for a thousand days, but how can you guard against a thief for a thousand days? One misstep, and it's all over...

Why don't I abandon the mission and relocate? Or I can go all out and ask Madam Judgment for help to apprehend Loki under the pretext that the mission will likely fail. It's feasible, but I'll shoulder a debt that I won't be able to repay until I become a demigod. Even if Ciel takes half of it, it'll be a heavy burden...

We can also ask Madam Hela to convene an emergency gathering and accuse Loki and the others of causing Muggle's death on the spot. We can request that we find reliable members to interrogate each other and see which side is lying. Uh, we can't be entirely sure if there's really something wrong with Loki and the others, but it's certain that I colluded with an outsider and lured in a spy...

The more Franca thought about it, the more frustrated she became. She used proverbs from her homeland and didn't deliberately change it.

Suddenly, an overwhelming sense of danger gripped her, and simultaneously, an eerie chill crawled up her spine.

Her body stiffened, and a figure reflected in her lake-like eyes.

Clad in a short black formal suit typical of clerks, with neatly combed brown hair, a face bearing Southern Continent heritage, and dull green eyes...

Wraith! The word flashed through her mind as she recognized the nature of the impending attack.

Franca's thoughts became hazy, and her right hand instinctively rose, as if resisting an unseen force.

She channeled the spirituality within her Soul Body, preparing to unleash the black flames of a Demoness.

This ability targeted a Spirit Body and was capable of incinerating Wraiths. Demonesses possessed a heightened resistance to such flames compared to other pathways, and they could even use injuries to escape or severely harm their adversaries.

At that moment, Franca heard a magnetic voice.

"It's futile. Surrender."

The sound pierced Franca's mind like sharp arrows, interrupting her attempt to condense the black flames.

As soon as the voice faded away, her mind seemed to be shrouded in a thick fog, and a thick frosted glass appeared in front of her.

The voice continued, "I didn't use my full strength in the evening to test the waters. The person impersonating Muggle with a high-level existence sealed in him must possess some special abilities. If I hadn't done my best to gather information, I might have been the one to die.

"After the probe, things got even more interesting. I went to his place just now and felt that it wasn't safe enough. Therefore, I planned to turn you into my marionette and launch a surprise attack.

“Heh heh, do you think you can escape my grasp? There's something special about us. As long as we're within a kilometer of each other, I can use the power of a great existence to sense your location.

“I've long yearned for a Demoness to be my marionette. It'll definitely taste good...”

Franca's Spirit Body was repeatedly affected by the sound, interrupting her efforts to activate Mirror Substitution and condense black flames in advance. Her thoughts became increasingly sluggish, and her joints felt as if they were filled with glue.

Can... Loki... sense... my location?

What's... so special... Why... can he...

Before Franca could piece together any answers or formulate a complete response, the magnetic voice, now with a sinister smile, continued, “I can't waste any more time. I must accelerate to avoid unforeseen complications.”

At this point, the voice turned respectful and recited in Franca's unusually familiar language, “The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings;

“The Sky Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings...”

Chapter 387 Vile

In the room with the thick curtains, Lumian suddenly felt the Mirror Substitution inside his clothes turn abnormally cold. Even through the linen shirt, he couldn't help but shiver.

His heart tightened. He couldn't afford to feign sleep anymore. He sat up and took out the mirror.

Beneath the faint crimson moonlight, the mirror lost its luster, its surface resembling ice.

Lumian knew that Franca was in danger. Without hesitation, he activated the mystical connection between the substitute and its true form, emitting a dim light from the black mark on his right shoulder.

In an instant, Lumian vanished from the bed, reappearing in the living room at 6 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian saw the surroundings engulfed in an eerie grayness, a fog obscuring the crimson moonlight. Franca lay in a recliner, her body contorting as if she fought for survival.

Her lake-colored eyes were filled with a turbulent mix of emotions: anger, fear, anxiety, and worry. A vague figure seemed to encircle her. Her head tried to move, but her movements were restrained by invisible threads.

Suddenly, the sound of nails scraping on a blackboard assaulted their senses, incomprehensible words piercing their Spirit Bodies. Their consciousness soared upward until they reached a dark void shimmering with countless stars.

In the highest reaches of this void, mysterious symbols swirled, their forms beyond description.

They coalesced into a dynamic, otherworldly door that defied the intrusion of even the moon's crimson light.

Lumian and Franca's spirits were drawn inexorably toward the door. As they approached, a faint voice emanated from within—a voice that seemed to hold the secrets of the entire universe, as well as the madness, self-destruction, and darkness lurking within every heart.

With each step toward the dynamic door, the maddening ramblings grew more intense, causing their heads to throb in agony. Yet an overpowering, primal urge compelled them to enter, to merge with the formless entity behind the door, and to partake in a clandestine pact that promised essential, primordial, extraordinary, and potent knowledge.

Amidst the sea of incomprehensible symbols, the door stood slightly ajar, allowing invisible entities to pass through.

With a resounding hum, Lumian and Franca's minds were plunged into a state of blankness, as if struck by a relentless force.

The chaotic ravings they had heard coalesced into grotesque, shadowy entities that corroded their very Soul Bodies and physical bodies.

Franca's eyes widened, and her flaxen-colored hair fluttered in the windless air, vaguely thickening.

Blood seeped from the corners of her eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth, and pores, as if a demon was trying to separate her flesh from her skin.

Franca's thoughts were in a state of intense disorder, as if a human had been thrown into a factory blender.

Seizing the moment, the Wraith that had been attached to Franca detached itself from the Demoness of Pleasure.

This Wraith, dressed in a sleek black suit, its eyes flickering with a sinister green hue, let out a piercing shriek.

A cacophonous shattering sound, both illusory and real, filled the room as Franca's body vanished from the recliner and reappeared in the bedroom.

Her Mirror Substitution had been activated instinctively, saving her from losing control, but she remained unconscious, collapsing on the spot.

Beneath the shattered mirror's reflection on the recliner, Lumian, though still affected by the ravings and shrieks, fared better than Franca.

His extensive experience with advancing Sequences and invoking boons where he met with more potent and terrifying murmurs had fortified his resistance against such assaults.

Despite the excruciating headache, scattered thoughts, and ruptured capillaries in various places, he retained some semblance of instinctual reaction and basic cognition. His face contorted grotesquely amidst the blood, but he held on.

In the next moment, the Wraith disappeared from the recliner and manifested within Lumian's blue eyes.

His mind instantly fogged, and his body grew frigid, as if his very blood had turned to ice.

Still capable of thought, Lumian promptly utilized his spirit world traversal ability to escape the room, teleporting several hundred meters away.

He understood that a Marionettist couldn't naturally transform into a Wraith, and the Wraith that possessed him was likely a marionette. With their distinctive combat styles, it was improbable for a Marionettist to engage directly. Therefore, once the marionette was beyond the Marionettist's range, it would lose control and become useless.

When the time came, Lumian would “teleport” back and attempt to take Franca away.

While this would leave him essentially incapacitated, it would also disable Loki's marionette. The adversary would then need to decide whether to launch a direct assault or retreat cautiously, as he couldn't predict how many teleportations Lumian's spirituality could endure—a capability unusual for a Pyromaniac. Loki's assessment might not be entirely accurate in this regard!

Just as Lumian was on the verge of activating his spirit world traversal mark, he heard a magnetic voice: “Give up.”

The words pierced Lumian's Spirit Body, disrupting his intentions.

Subsequently, his thoughts grew sluggish, and his body stiffened.

The magnetic voice chuckled softly.

“I don't know what kind of trap you've set in your room, but it likely involves Hela, doesn't it? After all, without her cooperation, you couldn't have masqueraded as Muggle and infiltrated the Research Society, could you? Lumian Lee, Aurore Lee's brother, I've seen your wanted poster.”

“In Trier, the easiest Beyonder to come into contact with is from the Hunter pathway. That's why there's a saying:

“‘Never fight a Hunter on his turf.’

“No one knows what sort of strange traps Hunters have laid in their ‘turf.’

“I didn't want to take that risk, nor did I plan to face Hela directly. Although I'm not overly concerned about her unless she's found a way to become a demigod, why would I engage her on a Hunter's ‘turf’? My choice was to stage a surprise attack on Hidden Blade, drawing you out and away from your turf to fight on a ground of my choosing.

“After this afternoon's reconnaissance, I confirmed that both of you possess an item capable of monitoring each other's condition or a mysticism connection—likely the exchange of Mirror Substitution. Heh heh, ever wonder what my other marionette was doing during that time?

“In truth, I have no intention of killing Hidden Blade or turning her into a marionette. A living Demoness serves my purposes better. I can use this encounter to make her

suffer and despair. When she advances to Sequence 4 using that, I'll have a demigod marionette..."

The voice carried no provocation, yet each word ignited a burning rage within Lumian.

These words continued to disrupt Lumian's mind and Spirit Body, interfering with his abilities. With the dual constraints of Wraith possession and Marionettist, Lumian resembled a statue, unable to speak or move. He stood frozen, awaiting the inexorable verdict of fate.

A thin gray fog enveloped the room, sealing off all sound from the outside world.

The magnetic voice chuckled again, its taunting words continuing.

"It really shouldn't have been so complicated, but you see, you have a high-ranking individual sealed within you. To ensure my own safety, the only option is to turn you into a marionette. I have no desire to face a high-ranking being after your demise. Who knows if he'll thank me or finish me along the way?"

"Curious how I recognized you, aren't you? It's highly unlikely that others would sense the seal within you, but in my eyes, it's as conspicuous as a firefly in the night. The moment you entered the room with the typewriter, I knew you were the one impersonating Muggle. So, unless you could maintain a considerable distance from me, like the first time you tried to evade my tracking, I could have followed you without the aid of my marionette.

"Indeed, when you showed up at the gathering and joined our April Fool's team, I sensed that something was amiss. I suspected that Muggle had used a seal to escape the fragmentation of her soul. Little did I know, she was truly deceased. You are her brother..."

"Haha, I still remember, in the latter part of last year, every time she attended a gathering, she sought out I Know Someone to treat her psychological issues and the hidden dangers arising from the improper use of the Soul Summoning Spell. And I Know Someone would divulge her pain, struggles, vulnerabilities, and transformations to all of us each time.

"It's quite vile, completely against a doctor's principles, but it's fun and interesting. It gave us a sense of accomplishment and made us all laugh."

Upon hearing this, Lumian's mind buzzed.

He had been mildly annoyed by Loki's earlier critiques, but now, as Loki recounted Aurore's experiences, his anger reached a boiling point.

Aurore had been genuinely unwell, seeking treatment from a doctor. However, not only did this doctor patronize her, but he also derived amusement from her suffering. He repeatedly violated her privacy, sharing her struggles and illnesses with others, leading them to mock her behind her back.

What made it all the more despicable was that this group of individuals had sold Aurore the Soul Summoning Spell.

Dammit!

Every single one... of them... deserves death!

They deserve... the most tragic way... of death!

Though Lumian's mind remained ensnared in stasis, his anger finally erupted. It surged through his spirit and coursed into his flesh.

He couldn't control it, not under the constant interference.

Crimson flames erupted from Lumian's body, and small red tendrils protruded from his eyes, radiating a malevolent blood-red hue.

It was a precursor to losing control. If this continued, he would truly lose control.

But Lumian felt no fear. Instead, he cooperated.

Even if I... lose control and turn into a monster... or a lunatic... I will... drag you... all of you... into the abyss!

Relying on his body's "instinctive reaction," crimson flames spread in all directions, incinerating the Wraith, igniting furniture, and causing a fire.

Unfortunately, this fiery onslaught proved ineffective against the Wraith-form marionette and Loki, who remained concealed somewhere beyond reach of the flames.

Its sole purpose, for those brief two seconds, was to disrupt the magnetic voice.

"It's useless. I know you mainly aim to use the flames to signal for help from the outside world rather than attacking me directly. But I've previously deceived Hidden Blade. Despite my claims of accelerating the progress, I actually harnessed the power of the gray fog to create a unique environment that isolates information here.

"While you can indeed break through the residual fog barrier if you go all out since I can't ask for too much power, I can't allow that."

As Loki finished speaking, a frenzied, terrifying, violent, and exaggerated aura exploded from Lumian's body. It shredded the thin fog and shot skyward.

Chapter 388 An Unquiet Night

As the frenzied and violent aura surged out of the thin gray fog, 6 Rue des Blouses Blanches trembled slightly, as if in shock.

In the various rooms of the building, the bodies of those who were already sound asleep involuntarily trembled, plunging into a blood-red nightmare. Those who were still awake looked around in surprise and confusion, as if they had been transported back to a time when barricades were everywhere and gunshots echoed through the air.

On a bed in a quiet room diagonally below Franca's apartment, a man whose eyes had been tightly shut, seemingly asleep, suddenly snapped awake. He gazed up warily and fearfully at the source of the terrifying aura.

At the same time, beneath Église Saint-Robert, within the market district's Inquisition's office, Angoulême de François, who was on night duty, leaped to his feet and prepared to rush to the area where mystical items were sealed. He hoped to enhance his ability to handle accidents and disasters in a short period.

In other rooms, Imre, Valentine, and the others also sensed the violent aura that seemed to shake all of Trier. Some trembled, while others turned pale.

This was even more terrifying than the Tree of Shadow disaster.

However, they didn't stand still. Some dashed out of the room to rendezvous with Angoulême, while others raised their arms and hastily prayed to the Sun before sprinting toward the Église Saint-Robert above.

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Gardner Martin, who had been stroking his full-body armor, furrowed his brow and cast a puzzled glance toward the southeastern region.

He felt something calling to him, causing his blood to boil.

Deep underground in Trier, Olson, the starved bear-like man who had been lugging a small brown suitcase, suddenly perked up his ears to listen for any nearby movements.

The distant sounds of killings and shouts faintly reached him.

The Supervisor of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's eyes flashed with ferocity and madness. He extended his right hand and pressed it against his neck.

An indiscernible thread emerged, emitting fiery blood.

In the island district at the center of the Srenzo River, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Saint Viève cathedral was already shrouded in darkness. Only the nearby bell tower remained lit, but at that moment, the slumbering cathedral suddenly bathed in brilliant sunlight.

Sunlight flooded the onion-like domes, illuminating every stained glass window.

To the north of Trier, in the heart of the cathedral district, towering iron-black chimneys loomed above the God of Steam and Machinery's patriarchal cathedral.

Rumbling sounds echoed as the massive steam engine installed within the cathedral roared to life. Vast amounts of pale-white fog billowed forth from the forest-like chimneys, enshrouding the night sky.

In Quartier Éraste, a small town very close to the Sacred Heart Cloister, a golden retriever and the lady beside it turned and gazed into the distance of Trier's metropolis.

Within Red Swan Castle, Count Poufer, already lying on his bed, opened his eyes.

He sensed the entire ancient castle become extremely oppressive, and nightmarish roars and screams echoed from deep underground.

At that moment, the Beyonders in the market district and powerful figures elsewhere in Trier were distracted by the undisguised and flamboyant aura of madness.

Hidden in a room diagonally below Franca's apartment, Loki had just reacted to the violent and terrifying aura. Before he could summon back the Wraith that had possessed Lumian and use it to escape through the spirit world with him out of caution, the surrounding darkness instantly intensified, swallowing the crimson moonlight and bringing an extreme calmness to the area.

He couldn't resist closing his eyes; he wasn't even aware of it. He tumbled backward onto the bed and fell into a deep slumber.

Lumian's thoughts returned to normal. He channeled his anger, pouring all his pent-up emotions into the crimson flames.

“Go to hell!”

With a low growl, he took a left step forward, his eyes protruding with red vessels while twisting his waist and swinging his right fist with all his might.

With a muffled explosion, the flames on Lumian's body coalesced on the surface of his fist, naturally condensing into a blazing white fireball.

The blazing white fireball shot from Lumian's right fist, following a predetermined path, and crashed into the wall beside the apartment.

The voice he had just heard emanated from behind the wall!

Boom!

A large hole tore through the wall, revealing a man standing in the corridor.

He had brown hair, brown eyes, and a gaunt face. He was the marionette Loki had employed that evening.

He was the one who had been speaking!

Before Lumian could realize that he hadn't found the real Loki, darkness surged over him like a tidal wave, engulfing him.

Having already vented his anger and flames, Lumian's heart quickly calmed. He subconsciously closed his eyes and slowly sank to the ground.

His contorted face began to relax, and his body and soul found peace.

He no longer showed any signs of losing control.

Dressed in a black widow-like dress and a veiled bonnet, Hela emerged from the darkness.

Being the closest to the apartment while searching for traces of the battle between Loki and Lumian, she was undoubtedly the first to arrive.

Without hesitation, she made Lumian, Franca, Loki, and the two marionettes vanish.

Her figure faded, and the dense darkness rapidly dissipated.

Apart from the collapsed wall, no evidence remained at the scene.

Two seconds later, the apartment was suddenly bathed in sunlight.

In an uninhabited mine beneath Trier.

Lumian, Franca, and company swiftly materialized.

They were all in a deep slumber, except for Hela. Her pale face remained conscious as she stood to the side.

The vice president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society no longer had the dry, withered hair she'd had before. It had transformed into smooth strands, now bearing the color of the night.

She pulled out a flask filled with liquor and downed a third of its contents before fixing her gaze on Lumian.

Hela's forehead began to crack silently, emitting an eerie, ancient glow that manifested into an indescribable, ancient bronze door.

The door swayed and creaked, revealing a narrow gap. Beyond it lay endless darkness, filled with countless dense, indescribable eyes seemingly lurking within.

Under the influence of this deathly aura, the Wraith attached to Lumian flew out without resistance.

In an instant, it landed on the ground, and Hela raised her right hand, pressing it against its forehead. The ancient bronze door vanished, and the dim light receded into the crack.

Hela shifted her attention to the still-slumbering Loki.

The leader of the April Fool's had an ordinary face, blending into the crowd like any other resident of Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Hela stared at him for a brief moment before her eyes lost focus.

In Loki's dream.

Hela appeared, clad in a black widow-like attire, in front of an ancient castle shrouded in a thin gray fog.

The castle's massive doors stood wide open, eerily silent like the entrance to a cemetery.

Hela glanced up at the pitch-black castle with its numerous spires and thin form before stepping through the door. She passed through the dimly lit atrium, and proceeded into the hall, where peculiar chandeliers with unknown light sources hung.

Numerous guests filled the hall, their expressions frozen like wax statues, unmoving.

Surrounded by dozens or even hundreds of wax statues was a gray platform with three stone steps. In the middle of the platform was an ancient dark-red chair.

A man in his late twenties occupied the seat.

He wore a silk top hat and a black tailcoat, with dark-gray eyes and short, brown hair. Under his high nose bridge, the subtle curl of his mouth hid a non-obvious smile.

Pressing down on the armrests on both sides, the man relaxed and leaned back in his chair.

"Who are you?" His voice echoed through the ancient castle, as if questioning Hela.

Hela walked past the crowd suspected to be wax statues and arrived in front of the man.

Her cold voice remained impassive as she inquired, "Loki, don't you recognize me?"

Loki's grin intensified.

"Hela, you've come after all..."

Seizing the opportunity presented by his dream state, Hela confronted him directly.

"Why did you harm a member of the Research Society?"

Loki's gaze shifted upwards, and he let out a laugh.

"The only purpose those fools serve is to amuse us.

"You must know that the apocalypse is imminent, just a few years away. They're all destined to die, sooner or later. It's better for them to sacrifice themselves now to provide us with entertainment."

Hela fell silent, and a chilling silence enveloped the dream, the air growing colder. Decaying, pale-white hands extended from the stone floor and surrounding walls.

After a few moments, Hela spoke again.

"Why did you harm Muggle?"

Loki's laughter ceased abruptly, replaced by a smirk as he looked at Hela.

"Because..."

His expression shifted suddenly, and Hela sensed imminent danger within the dream.

"Because the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings..."

Loki's voice faded rapidly, and the entire dream began to crumble under Hela's will. The ancient castle disintegrated into fragments, vanishing into an eerie, yet pure darkness.

Back in the real world, deep within the uninhabited mine beneath Trier, Hela opened her eyes. Countless tiny creatures wriggled beneath her pale-white skin.

In an instant, her form shifted and reassembled, no longer exhibiting the eerie abnormalities she had displayed earlier.

Loki's body had disintegrated into a pool of flesh and blood, with grotesque maggots crawling in and out of it. Hela observed silently, but no Beyonder characteristics emerged from the remains.

Within the pitch-black castle enveloped in a thin fog, a dark-red coffin lay in a sinister chamber.

Suddenly, a pale-white hand emerged from the coffin, gripping its wooden edge.

Chapter 389 Suspected God

In the uninhabited quarry cave beneath Trier.

Hela observed as the transparent and distorted maggots perished, yet she didn't detect any Beyonder characteristics emerging.

She turned her attention to Lumian and Franca, who were sound asleep. Satisfied that they had regained control thanks to the night and their dreams, and their breathing had steadied, she ended her forced slumber.

Two seconds later, Lumian's eyes shot open, and he leaped up with the agility of a leopard.

In an instant, he summoned three crimson flames that illuminated the cavern.

As he kept a vigilant watch over his surroundings, Franca, still recovering from severe mental injuries, rubbed her head and slowly got to her feet, fear in her eyes.

Then, she spotted Hela in her distinctive black widow-like dress and the familiar bonnet with a veil. She blurted out, “Madame Hela, what brings you here?”

Instant regret washed over her. She had inadvertently revealed her affiliation with the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

If she hadn't spoken, she could have pretended to be nothing more than a friend of Ciel—that she wasn't Hidden Blade.

“Hidden Blade?” Hela inquired.

Franca let out a dry laugh.

“Yes, how did you recognize me?”

“You're the only Demoness in the Research Society,” Hela replied calmly.

Franca felt even more embarrassed and replied ridiculously, “I recognized you based on your attire and demeanor. You never showed your face at the gatherings.”

As the two acknowledged each other, Lumian's wariness visibly eased. With Madame Hela's presence, he felt his safety was assured.

Then, he noticed the two marionettes lying lifeless on the ground, surrounded by a pool of flesh infested with translucent maggots.

“Is that Loki?” Lumian pointed at the grotesque, horrifying mass.

Hela cast her gaze over.

“Yes.”

Lumian fell silent for a moment before asking, “Is he dead?”

Hela nodded slightly and said, “He succumbed to his own loss of control, but it's not a complete demise.”

“Huh?” Franca asked in confusion.

Look at how badly minced he is. Maggots are crawling out, but he's not completely dead?

She had already figured out why Madame Hela had appeared. Ciel, that scoundrel, must have used her as bait again and written a letter to Madame Hela to clean up the mess!

Hela looked at Lumian and said coldly, “High-level Demonesses aren't the only ones capable of resurrection; high-level Seers can do it too. Loki likely worships an evil god in this domain.

Combined with his uniqueness, he can abandon his body upon death and revive in a pre-prepared location with his characteristics intact.

“Unfortunately, I didn't foresee this. If I had prayed for true Concealment in advance, he wouldn't have been able to revive, and he'd leave behind his Beyond traits.”

The woman calmly recounted her oversights, offering no excuses and showing no frustration.

Lumian's eyes remained fixed on the grotesque mass of flesh infested with dead maggots, a slow smile spreading across his face.

The corners of his mouth curled upward as he remarked, “Not bad at all. If he were to meet his end like this, I'd be disappointed. How can I not be the one to kill him with my own hands?”

As Lumian spoke, a burning desire for High-Sequence Beyond powers ignited within him.

Loki was undeniably formidable. Even when he and Franca had joined forces, Loki had come dangerously close to turning Lumian into a marionette. Yet, Hela, suspected to have advanced to Sequence 4, had effortlessly dispatched him in less than ten seconds.

Lumian understood that unleashing the Blood Emperor aura would undoubtedly draw the attention of official Beyonds from the market district, possibly prompting them to seek assistance from the Churches' saints. Therefore, after Hela had sought him out, she had to subdue Loki and relocate him within ten seconds. Otherwise, the chance of being intercepted by Trier's saints and angels was exceedingly high.

This was what a demigod was like!

Lumian eagerly looked forward to summarizing more Pyromaniac acting principles and digesting the potion over the next two to three months. His goal was to attempt an advancement to Conspirer. He recollected his plans for revenge against Loki and the others, the eradication of heretics, and his insatiable thirst for mystical, high-end powers.

Seeing Lumian's lack of regret or disappointment, replaced instead by an unwavering fighting spirit, Hela subtly nodded in approval.

Lumian's gaze remained fixed on Loki's corpse.

“Which evil god does he worship?”

Franca's heart skipped a beat at this question. She turned to Hela and asked, “Could it be...”

The Demoness of Pleasure paused briefly before switching to a complicated language that Lumian couldn't understand.

“The Immortal Lord...”

Hela abruptly cut her off.

“Have you forgotten that I don't understand that language either?”

“Uh...” Franca couldn't help but slap her forehead.

My pig brain!

Hela continued, "Speak in ancient Feysac or Intisian. Also, remember, pause after each line and tell me something else."

Franca quickly acknowledged her instructions, organized her thoughts, and began speaking in ancient Feysac.

"The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings..."

Hela interrupted her once again and engaged in a brief discussion about Loki's assault.

Franca continued, "The Sky Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings..."

Lumian, paying close attention, began to grasp the purpose of Madame Hela's request.

It was a precaution to prevent Franca from reciting the evil god's full honorific name and potentially attracting unwanted attention.

"The Exalted Thearch of Heaven and Earth for Blessings..." Franca repeated the third line and massaged her temples. "When I heard Loki recite it, it felt like I had been transported to another world. Everything was shrouded in fog, and I couldn't discern anything clearly. My thoughts slowed to a crawl. I vaguely recall that there should be another phrase."

Hela chimed in with her own addition in ancient Feysac, "The Celestial Worthy. Of Heaven and Earth. For Blessings."

This time, she even paused the simple line twice.

Lumian couldn't help but express his confusion. "This name has a rather odd style."

It differed significantly from the honorific names of deities like Mr. Fool, the Eternal Blazing Sun, and others he was familiar with. The format and words gave off the impression of belonging to a distinct civilization.

Franca furrowed her brow in thought.

"Now that you mention it, I recall something."

Lumian inquired, "What is it?"

Franca was about to speak but then abruptly closed her mouth.

She looked at Hela with a sheepish smile.

"Do you mind if I assisted Ciel in infiltrating the Research Society to investigate the April Fool's team?"

"He had my approval," Hela replied calmly.

Franca maintained her "submissive" smile.

"Then, would you mind if I had shared the secret of our transmigration with Ciel?"

Hela fell silent for a few moments before responding, "Does it matter if I mind now? Should I Conceal both of you?"

Franca suddenly realized that this situation might not be entirely negative and hastily explained, “You see, the April Fool's team is under suspicion for Muggle's death, and there's no way around revealing our secret when investigating them. That's why I told Ciel about it. Besides, Ciel has genuinely helped us find clues related to transmigration and the possibility of returning to our world!”

She wore an expression as if she had already made up for her mistake.

“What clues?” Hela blurted out for the first time.

Franca exhaled and said, “This is somewhat complex. Let me start by recalling what those honorific names reminded me of.

“We've been communicating, trying to find commonalities and similarities in what each of us did before transmigration to uncover the reason. Some received mysterious phones, others entered abandoned ancient temples in the mountains, and some were studying folklore culture. But I can't pinpoint what I did that led to it. It's not that I can't remember, but I've done so much.

“As you all know, I enjoy novelty. I buy new phones, play new games, try out new restaurants, and even create clothing and cosplay at major conventions. I engaged in a multitude of activities before transmigrating, making it difficult to determine which one triggered the transmigration.

“However, when I heard the honorific name Loki recited, I recalled that on that particular night, I had played a new video game called ‘Terror Attack.’ In the game, there was a hidden monster that had faith in something called the ‘Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth.’”

Though Lumian didn't comprehend the concept of a “video game,” he grasped the essence of Franca's explanation.

Her transmigration in this world appeared to be connected to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, whom Loki worshiped!

Hela, her light-blond hair flowing naturally over her shoulders, listened attentively and contemplated for a moment before speaking, “I don't have similar recollections. As I mentioned earlier, before transmigrating, I delved into non-mainstream mythological books. There was a deity skilled in deception and pranks who bore a striking resemblance to Loki...”

Franca's eyes gleamed with insight as she ventured a hypothesis.

“Could Loki have transmigrated by reciting the four lines of the honorific name? So, upon his arrival in this world, he recollected his actions from that time and attempted to recreate them, forging a connection with that evil god?

“Yes, he spoke vaguely when discussing such matters. The members of the April Fool's team shared a similar experience...”

“Could it be that we were all brought here by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings? Or did He summon us to this world?”

“He's highly suspicious!”

Hela contemplated this for a moment and nodded slightly.

“At our next gathering, we can revisit this topic and communicate with others with a clearer focus.”

Franca was taken aback.

“Will the members of the April Fool's team still attend?”

“The problematic ones probably won't,” Hela replied calmly. “Even if we hastily arrange a gathering now, we'd have to notify them individually. This period of time is sufficient for Loki to revive and alert his associates.”

Lumian raised his eyebrows.

“Why does everyone need to be notified individually? Just invite the April Fool's team to an emergency meeting. They won't know if others will attend. It won't take long to inform a dozen of them.”

Chapter 390 Hidden Danger

Hela glanced at Lumian and fell silent for two seconds before saying, “Alright, I'll get ready now.

“But don't get your hopes up. No matter how urgent the gathering is, you have to give others ten minutes to disguise themselves. Otherwise, they probably won't come.”

Ten minutes, combined with the discussion they just had, was enough time for Loki to revive and alert his accomplices.

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he nodded gently. “We have to give it a try.”

“That's right. Capture as many as we can. With an incisive point, it'll be much easier to find the others,” Franca agreed with Lumian.

She suspected that Loki and his crew were responsible for the deaths of some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Without wasting any more time, the surroundings around Hela suddenly darkened, resisting the light of the three flames.

Her figure vanished without a trace.

This marked the beginning of preparations for the emergency gathering.

Lumian's eyes flickered as he gazed at the decaying flesh teeming with dead maggots, lost in his own thoughts.

Franca carefully examined her body and realized that there were no substantial or obvious injuries. The pain she had previously endured was a result of the impact on her mind. As her Spirit Body was soothed and treated, only faint cracks remained.

Franca let out a long sigh of relief and said, "Loki is truly cunning and powerful. Fortunately, you thought to seek Madam Hela's help. Otherwise, we might have become his marionettes by now."

Lumian wholeheartedly agreed.

If he hadn't considered borrowing Hela's power and guessed that Loki could detect a certain trait in him, leading to the decision to bait him out tonight, perhaps the outcome wouldn't have been in their favor.

When they were unprepared, Loki had approached them and attacked with full force. Neither he nor Franca could retaliate.

He could still use the Blood Emperor's aura, which was relatively easy to activate and didn't require complicated procedures, to attract all official Beyonders. Then, he could exploit the time difference to escape using "teleportation." However, it would condemn Franca to be controlled.

Of course, without the baiting operation, Lumian might have chosen to leave with Franca by traversing the spirit world and slipping out of Loki's sight before returning stealthily.

"You don't have to worry about becoming a marionette. Loki wants to groom you into a Sequence 4 Demoness," Lumian casually reassured Franca.

Franca was taken aback.

"He told me he's been yearning for a Demoness marionette for a long time..."

Lumian calmly pointed out that Franca had been deceived. "He lied to you. He even said that the four-line honorific name meant to accelerate the progress was, in fact, a trap for me that could isolate most of the struggling commotions."

"..." Franca couldn't help but curse. "Dammit! Is there any truth in his words? As expected of the leader of April Fool's, the new-age swindler who lives diagonally opposite Salle de Bal Unique!"

Franca muttered to herself, "The honorific name he recited must be real. Him being able to use the traits we share and the power of that Celestial Worthy to directly locate me should be real too. As for the exact range, given the style he displayed, there's a high chance that it's nonsense. It can't be believed.

"What kind of traits could it be..."

"If the transmigration was indeed caused by that Celestial Worthy, it's very likely that we have His aura or brand on us. And with His power, Loki can easily locate us within a certain range."

Franca suddenly turned to look at Lumian.

“Loki should have recognized that you were fake during the gathering! You don't have the aura or mark of the Celestial Worthy on you!”

“Yes.” Lumian's mood sank.

“I'll have to share this detail with Madam Hela later and see if anyone can come up with a way to eliminate the Celestial Worthy aura on them. Otherwise, they'll be hunted down by Loki and the others in the future,” Franca said as she looked at the Wraith that had a dark-green light seeping out and merging with a certain part of the corpse. “What should we do with this Beyonder characteristic?”

This was a Sequence 5 Beyonder characteristic!

She had her own thoughts about this spoil of war, but she didn't know Lumian's attitude.

“Madam Hela killed Loki herself, so the spoils of war must belong to her,” Lumian said nonchalantly.

He then pointed at the corpse of the other marionette.

“Why hasn't he manifested any Beyonder characteristics?”

“That's right. He can't be resurrected too, can he?” Franca muttered. “Could it be that he's a bestowed who doesn't have Beyonder characteristics?”

Her plan was to give Madame Hela the Wraith Beyonder characteristic.

Lumian nodded slowly.

“In the evening, I thought he was a marionette of the Sun pathway. Later, when I was under his control, every word he spoke sounded like crazy ravings. It could affect my mind and Spirit Body, which was different from the Sun pathway's style. Yes, he should be a bestowed of an evil god, made into a marionette by Loki.”

“I'll ask Madam Hela later.” Just as Franca finished speaking, Hela's figure in a black widow-like dress outlined itself in the empty mine.

She said to Lumian and Franca, “In five minutes, we'll recite the incantation and enter the Nation of the Evernight's palace.”

“Alright.” Lumian took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

Franca immediately informed Hela about the possible common trait among the members of the Research Society. Finally, she asked, “Is there a way to confirm and eliminate it? A Marionettist like Loki lurks in the shadows and can find us at any moment. It's truly terrifying.”

Hela pondered for a moment and replied, “Firstly, advance to Sequence 4 and become a demigod. Only then can you barely suppress the aura left behind by Celestial Worthy. Secondly, search for mystical items with hidden and secret-keeping effects.”

“I can only think of these two solutions at the moment. I'll see if anyone else has a better idea at the next gathering.”

At that moment, Lumian looked at Hela and asked anxiously, “Madame, did you find out anything from Loki?”

Hela took out a flask and downed another third.

Her pale-white face flushed as she said coldly, “When I asked Loki why he wanted to harm the other members, he said it was for fun and to create pranks to satisfy his emotions and mind. However, when I asked him why he wanted to harm Muggle, his answer was Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings...”

Hela didn't finish her sentence, but both of them understood what she meant.

Selling the Soul Summoning Spell to Aurore and guiding her to use it on herself seemed to be the will of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.

“Why does He want this done... Aurore is only a Sequence 7. She's just a nobody...” Lumian lowered his head and muttered in pain.

Hela replied coldly, “Probably because the original body of Muggle and her family are problematic.”

Lumian fell silent for a moment before saying, “Could Loki be lying? A person full of lies like him might not be telling the truth.”

“In the dreamscape I created, he can't lie unless he gains the ability to maintain lucidity in advance, but that's impossible.” Hela denied Lumian's guess.

Dreamscape... Franca glanced at Hela and felt that this didn't match her impression of her Sequence pathway.

Lumian fell silent once again.

Aurore's transmigration was suspected to have been brought about by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. After her resurrection, she had been targeted by the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings because Roche Louise Sanson and her family were believers in Inevitability. This made Aurore's subsequent encounter seem like a predetermined tragedy.

Seeing this, Franca changed the subject and pointed at the two marionettes' corpses.

“Madame Hela, that Beyonder characteristic is the spoil of war you deserve. What we want to know is why this marionette didn't produce any Beyonder characteristics?”

Hela didn't refuse. As she watched the Wraith Beyonder characteristic emerge, she inquired about Franca and Lumian's feelings when they were controlled.

After a brief exchange, she pondered and said, “This should be a bestowed who believes in an evil god. The corresponding Sequence 7 is an Orator, and Sequence 6 is a Singer. These two Sequences can transmit different mystical powers with their voices, matching your descriptions.

“In addition, Beyonders of this pathway often perform secret deed rituals at Sequence 9 and obtain mysteries and knowledge through a formless door. Different people hear and experience different things, and the subsequent abilities they obtain will be different. Being able to use singing to create a sun's blinding effect should be one of these manifestations.”

“Which evil god?” Franca blurted out.

Hela shook her head.

“I don't know the exact honorific name either. It's dangerous for us to know anyway.

“I've encountered His believers. They sometimes refer to this evil god as the First Philosophy or Arcane Controller.”

Without waiting for Franca to ask further, Hela nodded slightly and said, “We should head to the gathering.”

Lumian and Franca recited the incantation simultaneously.

“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 surrounding darkness and slumber dissipated, Lumian and Franca arrived at the ancient and dilapidated palace again.

There was no one here yet. It was empty and silent.

Franca felt that something was amiss. After thinking for more than ten seconds, she realized something.

“We haven't disguised ourselves!”

Just as she finished speaking, she saw Lumian shrouded in a hazy dream-like fog, obscuring his exact form and appearance.

Lumian then used the Niese Face to transform himself into a hooded Muggle clad in a Warlock's black robe.

With Madame Hela's help, Franca breathed a sigh of relief and waited patiently for the April Fool's team to arrive.

As time ticked by, two figures suddenly outlined inside the silent palace.