

## Inevitability 431

Chapter 431 Three Hunters, One Stage

Elros extended her right palm and unleashed a crimson fireball.

The fireball streaked in front of the two fiery serpents and collided with the ground.

Amidst the rumbling, it engulfed the flaming serpents in its own explosion, halting their advance toward the bronze coffin.

Without further ado, Albus picked up the carbide lamp and rose to his feet.

He glanced at Elros and grinned.

“So you do know something?”

Albus then taunted Lumian, “You're in the dark here.”

Dammit! If it weren't for this inappropriate setting, I'd go head to head with you... Only now did Lumian realize that Albus's recklessness had been a test and a trap.

“This is the Red Swan Castle of the Sauron family,” Elros replied, not directly addressing Albus but stating a simple fact.

She was implying that she had the Sauron family's bloodline and had resided in Red Swan Castle for nearly six years. It was only natural for her to possess knowledge.

Albus shifted his gaze to the white candles, their flames nearly one-third extinguished, as if he hadn't heard Elros. He asked straightforwardly, “What are you doing in the depths of this underground palace? If you don't share, how can we cooperate and assist you?”

Elros looked at the bronze coffin and unexpectedly turned to Lumian, “I wish to explore this forbidden area, known as the family's secret ground. Only a few are allowed inside to discover if the curse in our blood is connected to this place.”

“You're an Einhorn. Do you genuinely consider yourself a Sauron family member?” Albus Medici taunted the lady.

This was both a dig at Elros for concealing the complete truth and an effort to sow discord between her and the Sauron family, making her aware of her place. So, there's no need to help the Sauron family conceal those secrets? Lumian discerned a double meaning in Albus's words.

This made him suspect that the other party might already be a Conspirer. His unlikable demeanor might be a disguised trap.

Unfazed, Elros sighed and said, “I bear half of the Sauron family's bloodline and am also a Hunter. I too will be haunted by that curse.”

At this point, she turned her gaze towards Albus Medici and inquired, “What brings you to the depths of the underground palace? Don't tell me you're truly here to indulge in my naive cousin's childish games?”

Albus responded in a half-sigh, half-sincere tone, "It's time for the Sauron family's curse to come to an end.

"And to break this curse, we must first fathom the essence and origin of this curse."

"Is that so?" Elros no longer displayed the same obedience and restraint.

Albus chuckled.

"You misunderstand. This is what we call the highest level of love, compassion, and benevolence. There are no limits, and I embody that."

I'd be a fool to take your word for it... Nevertheless, a true Conspirer doesn't just tell lies. They always reveal partial truths or even the whole truth. It's just that they omit the crucial parts... What was the truth in Albus Medici's response? Could it be that he genuinely wishes to help the Sauron family break the curse? If Elros were to say so, I'd believe her. How can an outsider like him, with no ties to the Sauron family, possess such kindness... Could it be a byproduct of pursuing his true objective? Lumian listened silently, dissecting the responses of his two "companions."

He didn't completely trust Elros either, suspecting that she was only revealing part of the truth.

Her abrupt change in demeanor and her command over the giant black spiders didn't seem like something a young girl living in her grandfather's house would be capable of.

Elros and Albus evaluated Lumian's explanation with identical, almost mocking smiles. Then, they both turned to him and asked in unison, "Why did you venture into the depths of the underground palace?"

"Me?" Lumian pointed at himself with his free left hand and responded honestly, "Someone entrusted me with investigating the Sauron family's decline and provided me with something."

The "someone" referred to Gardner Martin, and the "something" pertained to the dangerous corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché, although Lumian didn't disclose whether he had accepted it.

Albus smiled, acknowledging the lie while being aware of Lumian's "true identity."

Elros's eyes flickered, swiftly assessing which parts of Lumian's words were true and which were lies or incomplete.

After a moment of silence, Lumian sighed and chided both Albus and Elros.

"You Hunters, despite all you've said, not a single one of you took a step forward!"

The three of them remained at the door, waiting for one another to step into the minefield.

"Talking to you guys is a waste of time." Albus sighed.

Nevertheless, he refrained from advancing. He clicked his tongue and added, "If only a Beyond of the Sailor pathway were here at a time like this."

"Don't assume that Beyonders of the Sailor pathway are impulsive, reckless, and impatient. The potion may have an effect, but a person's character and experience

are the most critical factors determining their actions. If you rely on such stereotypes for Beyonders of the Sailor pathway in the future, you may find yourself turned into a characteristic," Elros mocked Albus.

Lumian abstained from joining their debate and asked contemplatively, "If we hadn't chosen the middle path and the Door of Madness, would we still be here?"

"Yes, but some rooms are even more dangerous," Elros replied, her gaze fixed on the hall's surroundings.

Lumian nodded and asked, "Will we encounter demigod-level monsters?"

"Most of the demigod-level Beyonder characteristics have been retrieved. Many below the demigod level still linger in the underground palace, turning this place into a restricted hunting ground for members of the Sauron family seeking to improve themselves." Elros didn't seem inclined to conceal anything for the Sauron family.

Most of them have been retrieved... Does that mean some are still hidden in the depths of the underground palace? Did this coincide with the complete disappearance of some core members? Do the Sauron family not want to retrieve them, or are they incapable of doing so?

Indeed, Elros's description aligns with the Sauron family's current situation. There aren't many saint-level demigods, but it's still a substantial number. Many core members are scattered in the military, politics, and business world, holding significant influence... Are they lacking strength at a higher level? There are no angels, only a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. Or is there just one angel? Lumian glanced around and realized that Elros and Albus remained remarkably patient, as if they had frozen in their spots.

Truth be told, Lumian was tempted to observe the outcomes of Elros and Albus, using their luck to gauge the danger of venturing deeper into the hall within the underground palace. However, given Elros's erratic temperament and the unnerving silence of Termiboros, he abandoned the idea.

Not only was it extremely risky, but it could also mislead him!

At that moment, Lumian suddenly felt a surge of danger.

He swiftly turned, his gaze following the glow of the carbide lamp, and Albus and Elros did the same.

In the diagonal corridor above, a hand with dark-red, almost black blood vessels extended from the darkness, pressing against the wall, illuminated by the faint yellowish glow.

Lumian's eyelids twitched as he recalled the image that had left the most profound mark on his nightmares, a result of the King's Pie game.

In the bronze coffin, surrounded by white candles, a hand with dark-red, nearly black blood vessels suddenly extended, gripping a shriveled, blackened heart, from which blood oozed!

Has the menacing creature from the bronze coffin surfaced? Before Lumian could activate Spirit World Traversal, an intense fear overwhelmed him, as if it wanted him to yield, and he involuntarily bent forward.

Instinctively resisting and struggling, he, along with Albus and Elros, stepped back and entered the hall.

In an instant, an illusion materialized before their eyes.

Lumian “witnessed” the hall enveloped in surreal purple flames, akin to an inferno from myths and legends.

At the heart of the purple flames was the bronze coffin. It had turned transparent, as if it had lost its physical form, revealing an iron-black ring pressing down on it.

The ring was embedded in the ground, with viscous, bottomless blood-colored spring water in its center. In the spring water, shriveled and blackened hearts bobbed up and down.

Bloodlines extended from the iron-black ring. Some wound around the base of the bronze coffin and burrowed into it, while others connected to the white candles.

In the next moment, Lumian heard a frenzied and violent illusory roar, as if emanating from deep underground.

His mind reeled, and he lost consciousness.

In the boundless darkness, the bewildered Lumian faintly heard a majestic voice, but the words eluded his understanding.

In his stupor, he strained to discern the voice. Aurore's melodious song and the ethereal flute of the shepherds echoed in his ears.

“I'm the elf of spring...”

As the voices gradually grew more distinct, Lumian sensed searing heat in his right palm.

The intensity of the sensation was almost tangible, accompanied by a burning pain.

Pain... Pain! Lumian snapped out of his fugue and forced his eyes open.

Before him, a crimson fireball blazed, and he found himself encased within a metal framework, his body held upright.

At that moment, a man dressed in black robes, sporting a vivid red beard that made him look like a human-lion hybrid, stood before the metal frame. He held softened candles and pressed them against Lumian's body, one by one.

Without hesitation, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

With a ghostly flicker, he vanished from the metal frame, along with a portion of the candles.

Lumian materialized swiftly at the entrance to Red Swan Castle's underground labyrinth.

He hastily scanned the surroundings and breathed a sigh of relief, seeing that everything seemed normal.

Without delay, Lumian brushed the wax from his body and examined his belongings.

To his astonishment, not only were the original mystical items, gold coins, banknotes, and various lotions intact, but even the Beyonder characteristic of the wax figure artisan and the shriveled heart he had obtained in the underground palace remained.

No one searched me? Amid his bewilderment, fragmented memories flitted through his mind.

He recalled scenes of himself walking in silence through the darkness without his carbide lamp.

In those images, his countenance appeared lifeless and rigid, like that of a wax figure.

Eventually, he reached a room and nestled within a metal framework, calmly awaiting the wax figure artisan's transformation.

This doesn't resemble me at all... Lumian rubbed his throbbing head and opted to ascend the stairs, departing the underground labyrinth.

He promptly returned to the first-floor living room, where he found the poet, Iraeta, happily sipping absinthe.

"You're back too?" Iraeta inquired with curiosity.

"Yes," Lumian replied, having regained his composure, as he settled onto the sofa and offered a smile. "I got separated from them."

As he finished speaking, Albus, with his fiery red hair, made his appearance at the living room door.

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#### Chapter 432 Beatdown

Albus was caught off guard when he spotted Lumian comfortably seated on the sofa.

"That was quick."

"You're not slow either," Lumian replied with a "kind" smile.

From his point of view, breaking free from the ethereal, underground roar and not turning into a wax statue indicated that Albus wasn't just an ordinary member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Perhaps the sinister corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché was helping him withstand that terrifying roar.

In contrast, Elros Einhorn, with her unique Sauron family bloodline, seemed more likely to emerge unscathed and return safely.

Albus flashed a smile, pulled up a chair, and casually enjoyed some refreshments as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. He signaled the servant nearby to replace his tea with a fresh cup of black tea.

After about four to five minutes, both Lumian and Albus simultaneously shifted their attention towards the living room door.

Elros, dressed in a comfortable dress, entered the room.

Seeing Lumian and Albus, she appeared surprised but not shocked. She quickly put on a polite, obedient smile.

Elros resumed her seat, becoming once again the reserved girl staying at her maternal grandfather's house.

Poet Iraeta seemed oblivious to the unusual atmosphere. He sipped his absinthe and discussed poetry writing with Lumian.

Fifteen minutes later, Count Poufer, decked out in a scarlet velvet coat, returned to the living room with Novelist Anori and Painter Mullen.

When Poufer laid eyes on Lumian, the owner of Red Swan Castle was visibly taken aback, nearly losing control of his expression.

He never anticipated encountering Ciel Dubois again, or more accurately, Ciel Dubois in his present state!

Shortly after, Poufer's gaze swept across Albus, Elros, and Iraeta, his face reflecting shock and suspicion as if he had stepped into a surreal dream.

“Ah, Poufer, you're finally back. We had given up on the adventure long ago and decided not to delve deeper into the dark maze.” Albus set aside his mille-feuille and warmly welcomed him. “How did it go? Did you manage to locate the Count's crown?”

Instinctively, Poufer shifted his body to prevent Albus, with his hands smeared in pastry flakes, from giving him a hug.

He managed to force a smile and replied, “We had no luck finding it either. When did you get back?”

“Less than half an hour ago.” Only then did Albus remember to smack his hands and brush off the pastry crumbs.

Lumian rose from his seat and inquired, “Where's Monsieur Ernst Young?”

Novelist Anori shook his head.

“He got separated from us. I hope he remembers to pull the bell rope and summon the servants to find him.”

“That's correct. The servants in this castle know the underground palace better than I do,” Poufer remarked, his expression returning to its usual state as he settled into an armchair.

Lumian was eager to return and confirm his discoveries. He glanced at the antique wall clock hanging on the wall and smiled at Poufer.

“I still have some matters to attend to, so I won't be attending the banquet tonight.”

Poufer's mind seemed preoccupied, and he didn't press Lumian to stay. He rose once more and escorted Lumian to the living room's exit.

Lumian cast a grateful look at the owner of Red Swan Castle and shook his hand with sincerity.

“Count, thank you for a fantastic afternoon. I thoroughly enjoyed this game. I hope we can play it again.”

From the depths of his heart, Lumian wanted to express his gratitude to Poufer Sauron. Not only had he provided an “opportunity” to digest the potion, but he had also “unveiled” the family's hunting grounds, making it easier for Lumian to locate suspected Beyonder creatures related to Conspirers without extensive searching.

How could he not show his appreciation?

Of course, Lumian genuinely desired to eliminate Poufer Sauron. If not for his uniqueness, he would have been turned into a wax statue.

Lumian's sole reason for not launching a direct attack wasn't concern about Sauron family retaliation or fear of spoiling the Iron and Blood Cross Order's plans. Instead, he instinctively believed that even though Poufer Sauron appeared to be an ordinary person or a relatively weak Beyonder with limited knowledge, if Lumian were to confront him, he might well be the one facing danger.

Count Poufer's expression soured as he received the heartfelt gratitude.

Lumian appeared oblivious to this and reiterated his desire to partake in another underground palace adventure game. With that, he turned and exited the living room, leaving Poufer Sauron perplexed and watchful.

After departing from Red Swan Castle and boarding the four-wheeled, four-seater borrowed from Gardner Martin, Lumian's smile faded, replaced by a solemn countenance.

At the conclusion of this underground palace adventure, he had gained a clear understanding of the disparity between his strength and that of higher-level entities. With a mere illusory roar, he lost consciousness and self-control, unable to resist.

Only thanks to Mr. Fool's seal, Termiboros's presence, and the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor did he manage to escape with his life.

My Sequence is still too low... Lumian sighed inwardly and closed his eyes, reflecting on the adventure's details.

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Gardner Martin leisurely roamed through the armor and weapons on display in the hall, running his fingers over the metallic textures as Lumian recounted his encounters in the depths of the underground palace. He described the room with the wax statues, the wax statue artisan, the mutated black spider, the iron soldiers, the bronze coffin, the white candles, and the eerie roar.

However, Lumian omitted the details of how he had escorted Poet Iraeta back to the underground palace's entrance. He also left out the part about burning the wax statues and him murdering the wax statue artisan.

Finally, he couldn't conceal his anger, frustration, and perplexity.

“Commanding Officer, didn't you promise to secretly watch to prevent any mishaps? If I hadn't inexplicably awakened, I'd be a wax statue now!

“Did you use Albus to keep an eye on me?”

Lumian's questioning tone didn't seem to provoke Gardner Martin. The latter turned to him, his smile widening as he spoke calmly.

“I was indeed observing from the shadows.”

At this point, his smile grew even more, but his voice remained composed.

“I witnessed you escorting the poet back to the underground palace's entrance. I saw you set fire to the wax statues in that room and detonate the wax statue artisan's head.”

Wh— Lumian's eyes narrowed, and a shiver ran down his spine as his hair stood on end.

He blurted out, “Albus is already back?”

How did the Boss find out about my actions?

Could he truly be trailing me in secret or monitoring my every move in the underground maze?

How did he do it? I didn't notice at all!

Gardner Martin chuckled.

“Albus hasn't returned yet.”

It wasn't Albus? That's right, Albus had no knowledge of my actions regarding the wax statue artisan's demise. No one else was present... How did the Boss discover it? Lumian's usual tendency to underestimate Gardner Martin vanished, replaced by a sense that the head of the Savoie Mob, the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, possessed more mystery and power than he initially believed.

Previously, perhaps Madam Magician of the Tarot Club and Mr. K of the Aurora Order had displayed abilities that Lumian found beyond imagination or awe-inspiring. Therefore, when facing Gardner Martin, who appeared to be the weakest of the three “superiors,” Lumian had always considered him less formidable. He even believed that if they were within a five-meter range, he might have a chance to eliminate this Commanding Officer.

Now, from the looks of it, Lumian wasn't confident.

Considering that Gardner Martin might have revealed this information to unnerve him, Lumian didn't attempt to conceal his changing expressions and body language.

Gardner Martin observed Lumian's bewildered and fearful expression and added with a smile, “Do you really think you woke up for no reason?”

Whoa, so you're the one who helped? If I hadn't heard the grandiose voice, Aurore's humming, and the conversation with the people in Cordu and felt the burning pain in my right palm, I would have believed you... In essence, the corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché could have helped me break free from that state, but the Boss had intentionally left it ambiguous. He wants me to believe that he had played a role. This Hunter didn't lie, but he certainly didn't disclose the whole truth. How much of what he said was based on what he saw with his own eyes, and how much was gathered through other means? Lumian's thoughts raced as he bowed his head.

“Thank you, Commanding Officer.”



Gardner Martin nodded warmly with a smile and said, "We've gained something from this operation. At the very least, we know that there are terrifying items sealed deep in Red Swan Castle's underground palace. Do you want to exchange them for rewards or save them to trade for valuable items later, such as higher Sequence potions?"

Lumian had accumulated a sum of 20,000 verl d'or over the past month through Gardner Martin's funds, his "salary" from Salle de Bal Brise, and his earnings from acting. Money wasn't an immediate concern.

He pondered for a moment.

"Let's save them for now."

As he spoke, he presented the Beyonder characteristic of the wax statue artisan and other items to Gardner Martin and inquired, "Boss, can I use these to concoct the Conspirer potion?"

Gardner Martin examined the shrunken blood-colored brain and the shriveled, blackened heart for a moment.

"When combined, they can be used to concoct the Conspirer potion, but they will have additional Hunter, Provoker, and Pyromaniac characteristics compared to ordinary ingredients. You need to be very confident before using them.

"Right, this heart still retains traces of the Sauron family's bloodline, which might affect your advancement to some extent. If you're not confident, I can provide you with a Conspirer potion in exchange for these ingredients and make up the difference. Consider it a partial reward."

In essence, ordinary Black Hunting Spiders and Sphinxes only possess the Conspirer Beyonder characteristic, excluding the ones from before. The wax statue artisan and the mutated black spider were like two halves of a Conspirer. When combined, they formed a complete Sequence 9 to 6 Beyonder... Lumian grasped the situation and smiled.

"It sounds like it will make me stronger. I'd like to see if I can handle the associated risks."

Gardner Martin didn't push further and allowed Lumian to depart.

Upon returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian took his place at his desk and began writing a letter to Madam Magician.

#### Chapter 433 Secret Past

Lumian diligently wrote down every detail of the events that had unfolded from the moment Lumian set foot in Red Swan Castle. He condensed the communications, focusing on the key points.

He had a strong sense that the Sauron family's underground maze concealed a crucial secret. Fearing that he might lack the knowledge and write off problematic parts as normal, inadvertently overlooking something, he decided to mention everything and allow Madam Magician to assess it herself.

It took Lumian half an hour to draft the letter.

He then closed the curtains and performed a ritual, summoning the “doll” messenger.

After nearly twenty minutes, the messenger returned with two folded squares of letter paper.

There are actually two pages. She places quite a lot of importance on this... Lumian contemplated for a moment before silently unfolding them.

“Gardner Martin is correct. The so-called wax statue artisan and mutated black spider are actually an enhanced Sphinx and Black Hunting Spider respectively. They contain Beyonder characteristics of the previous Sequences. What he didn't mention is that using the heart not only affects your advancement but is also linked to a special ritual that causes Beyonders who use it to merge with some of the Sauron family's bloodline, potentially subjecting them to a curse. However, for you, there's nothing to worry about. You've already taken the role of emperor during the King's Pie game. Why should you fear this?

“That tiny trace of the Sauron family's bloodline might have an undiscovered significance at some point.”

Undiscovered significance... Is Madam Magician hinting at something she observed in her astromancy? If I genuinely use that withered heart to concoct the potion, not only will I possess a hint of the Blood Emperor's aura, but I'll also have a bit of the Sauron family's bloodline. What kind of f\*cking amalgamation would this be!? Lumian mercilessly mocked himself.

If he further possessed an Einhorn bloodline, Lumian wouldn't even dare to imagine whether he'd be considered a prodigy in the Hunter pathway or simply mediocre.

After this self-mockery, Lumian continued to read.

“You've gained a lot from this adventure. Combining your experiences, what you've witnessed, what you've heard, and what you've encountered in the previous two King's Pie games, my initial assessment is that the formidable angel Vermonda Champagne Sauron from 200 years ago is still alive. He resides somewhere underground in that chamber, confined within a bronze coffin, surrounded by white candles, iron-black rings, blood-colored spring water, and the hearts extracted from the Sauron family's core members through a unique ritual. Even the entire underground maze is linked to a perilous Sealed Artifacts, designed to limit Vermonda Sauron's movements to the greatest extent.

“This is the first victim of the Sauron family's curse. Why did He vanish suddenly, why did He descend underground, and why does He remain alive? It has had a profound impact on generations of Red Swan Castle and the Sauron family, driving them to the brink of insanity. This is a crucial matter that requires further clarification. It's the real cause behind the Sauron family's decline.

“It's too dangerous for you. At your Sequence, you would find it extremely challenging to investigate. As you've experienced, even hearing Vermonda Sauron's voice causes temporary disorientation, leaving you in a daze, and the wax statue artisan would reconstruct you. This prevents you from getting close to the bronze coffin and the seal over it.

“Of course, once you possess a trace of the Sauron family's bloodline and master the special ritual that Poufer Sauron once underwent, you might have a chance to enter that chamber. But all in all, I advise against taking this risk until you're prepared to advance to Sequence 4 and approach the threshold of godhood. If Gardner Martin assigns a similar mission in the future, just perform it perfunctorily.

“Considering your contributions, the next time you require a potion formula or specific ingredients, feel free to contact me directly. You'll receive a substantial discount.”

Angel? Lumian's eyelids twitched.

The mysterious and missing Sauron family ancestor, Vermonda, was, in fact, a formidable angel!

The voice that had instantaneously robbed him of consciousness and nearly caused him to faint belonged to a genuine Mythical Creature!

Furthermore, this angel remained in a state of complete madness and needed to be sealed.

The Sauron family's underground maze is indeed a perilous place, but it also conceals a wealth of “treasures”... Lumian muttered with a mix of lingering fear and anticipation.

In reality, even without Madam Magician's advice, he had no desire to risk approaching the chamber with the bronze coffin.

What if Poufer Sauron was waiting there next time, and he ended up losing himself, only to be killed?

It appeared that the mission to investigate the cause of the Sauron family's decline could only progress once he grew stronger.

Of course, Gardner Martin could handle it himself or seek assistance from the vice presidents of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

After digesting these paragraphs, Lumian exhaled and continued reading the last part of the letter.

“Albus Medici isn't as straightforward as he may seem—not just a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. His last name is self-explanatory.

“In ancient times, before Blood Emperor Alista Tudor became the Red Priest, the God of War had another name. He was one of the eight Kings of Angels who had once served under the Ancient Sun God, known as the Red Angel or War Angel Medici.

“One of His duties was to watch over and instruct Amon.”

King of Angels... How do they differ from regular angels? The Ancient Sun God's impact on the future was profoundly significant. The one revered by the Aurora Order, some of the seven orthodox gods, Amon, and the former God of War, Medici... Lumian pondered, realizing that many issues of the current era might trace back to events two to three thousand years ago, linked to the Ancient Sun God's downfall.

His curiosity was piqued, and he read the remainder of the content with greater focus than before.

“Red Angel Medici, the Sauron family, and the Einhorn family's most ancient ancestor all perished simultaneously under Alista Tudor and the nobles' combined efforts, giving rise to the Red Priest. However, after the Blood Emperor's demise, the Sauron and Einhorn families reclaimed their Beyonder characteristics.

“A King of Angels doesn't meet His end so easily. For some reason, the Red Angel, Sauron, and Einhorn merged into a potent evil spirit, a fusion of malevolence. Just a few years ago, this evil spirit found a means to break free from the geographical confines, vanishing without a trace from its place of origin.

“Red Angel Medici left behind numerous descendants and established a secretive angelic lineage, with many residing in Bansy Harbor. Yes, the same Bansy Harbor I mentioned earlier, which was greatly corrupted and directly annihilated by the Church of Storms. However, over the past one to two thousand years, members of the Medici family have gradually departed the island and returned to the Northern Continent. Albus Medici should be a direct descendant of one such individual.

“It's reasonable to suspect that Albus may have already crossed paths with this evil spirit. Removing the Sauron family's curse could be part of the evil spirit's agenda, and the portion linked to Red Angel Medici likely desires the Sauron family's hoarded possessions. They also seek to uncover what Vermonda Sauron experienced.

“As for Albus's presence at the Sacred Heart Cloister, it might be due to the evil spirit guiding him or the Iron and Blood Cross Order sensing an anomaly and sending him to establish contact with the monks and gather information.

“Don't worry, Miss Justice and Susie will keep a close watch.”

There's an issue with the Sacred Heart Cloister... Lumian hadn't foreseen problems with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's largest cloister in Trier, but Madam Magician's words had unmistakably highlighted this situation.

Previously, when he speculated about Albus's purpose at the Sacred Heart Cloister, he had engaged in extensive analysis, yet he hadn't contemplated an issue with the cloister itself. He had merely assumed that Gardner Martin was seeking to understand certain matters there and gauge the inclinations and attitudes of various Eternal Blazing Sun Church factions.

Combined with Madam Magician's statement that someone from the Tarot Club was monitoring a potential lead, Lumian now suspected that the issue with the Sacred Heart Cloister might be linked to the worship of an evil god!

A substantial crisis is brewing... Lumian's sense of urgency surged.

At the end of the letter, Madam Magician wrote:

“Perhaps Gardner Martin's ability to 'see' something in the underground maze is related to his exposure to the corruption at 13 Avenue du Marché. It could also be due to the item smuggled in through Rat. I don't know what it is exactly.

“Consume the potion soon and advance to Sequence 6. If the catastrophe is averted unsuccessfully in the future, teleport out of Trier with the Two of Cups and your friends, or seek refuge in Mr. Fool's cathedral.”

Lumian read the reply and contemplated it for a moment, silently watching it consumed by the crimson flames.

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601.

Franca, clad in a cotton shirt and light-colored pants, looked surprised when she saw Lumian outside the door.

“Didn't Poufer Sauron's banquet just begin?”

Why did he return so suddenly?

“I ventured into Red Swan Castle's underground maze this afternoon and gained quite a bit,” Lumian replied with a smile as he entered the room and closed the door. “I need your help now.”

“What did you gain? And how can I help?” Franca inquired, a mix of curiosity and confusion in her expression.

Lumian chose to address the latter question.

“Help me hold something. If something goes wrong after I consume the potion, open it immediately.”

“Consume the potion?” Franca was taken aback. “Have you finished digesting your Pyromaniac potion?”

“The digestion is complete,” Lumian affirmed with a smile.

Franca instinctively asked, “Have you gathered all the ingredients for your Conspirer potion?”

“Yes,” Lumian replied with a grin.

“...” Franca couldn't help but mutter, “You've only been out for an afternoon, but it feels like you've been gone for two to three weeks...”

Not only had the Pyromaniac potion been fully digested, but he had also acquired most of the ingredients for the subsequent potion!

Lumian showed an unusual sincerity as he explained, “This is all thanks to nature—no, thanks to Poufer Sauron.”

#### Chapter 434 Utilizing the Special Environment

In a dim tunnel supported by stone pillars, Franca, indifferent to the presence of carbide lamps, turned to Lumian and expressed her concern.

“Are you absolutely sure there won't be any issues with using that heart to advance? Even if you don't appear afraid of the Sauron family's curse, it could still affect your condition after consuming the potion and potentially lead to failure. Honestly, Gardner's proposal is worth considering. Consuming an additional Sequence 9 to Sequence 7 potion will make you stronger, but not by much. There won't be any qualitative changes, so it's better to take a safer route.”

The Demoneess of Pleasure had already learned about Lumian's experiences in Red Swan Castle's underground maze and most of the information from Madam Magician's letter.

While she was awed by the special soldiers' existence and the frenzied cries of the uncontrollable angel, she couldn't help but be concerned about Lumian's plan to use the Beyonder characteristic of the wax statue artisan and the shriveled heart of the mutated black spider to concoct the potion.

Lumian, holding a carbide lamp, chuckled.

“I'm doing it because I'm more than confident.”

Franca remained skeptical. “Do you have a method to negate the influence of the heart's remaining bloodline?”

At this point, it was as if she snapped out of her reverie.

“Where are we headed? Aren't you going to drink the potion? Just find a quiet spot. There's no need to keep wandering underground, right?”

Lumian chuckled.

“It's precisely because the destination is special that I believe I can minimize the influence of the Sauron family's residual bloodline in the heart.”

Simultaneously, it would reduce the risk of the corruption in his body during the advancement!

Franca's curiosity was piqued. “Where are we going?”

Lumian replied with a smile, “You'll find out when we get there.”

“Dammit! I hate people like you who leave sentences hanging!” Franca couldn't resist cursing.

After more than half an hour, Franca pointed ahead to a naturally formed and modified stone door cave, her expression a mix of surprise and realization. She asked, “Is this the destination you were talking about?”

The entrance was marked with numerous engravings of skulls, skeletal arms, sunflowers, and symbols related to steam.

This marked the entrance to the catacombs, leading to the Death Empire!

“Somewhere inside,” Lumian replied. He retrieved a white candle from the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves and tossed it to Franca. With a smile, he added, “I want to consume the potion under the watchful eyes of God.”

“Under the gaze of God?” Franca eyed Lumian suspiciously, wondering if he had succumbed to the peculiar habits of an Astrologer.

He didn't seem to be speaking in a straightforward manner!

Lumian chose not to elaborate. Instead, he lit a white candle and ventured into the catacombs.

As usual, the administrators challenged them, and they made their assurances. The two eventually reached the third level of the catacombs, where they encountered a sacrificial pillar composed of two weathered boulders, surrounded by a small square.

Upon entering this remarkably clean area, Franca had an epiphany.

“Are you trying to exploit the uniqueness of this place?”

She had previously explored the catacombs but hadn't ventured deep into the third level. Lumian had only mentioned that there was a square here with two sacrificial pillars symbolizing the Eternal Blazing Sun and the God of Steam and Machinery.

Under the protection of these two pillars, even if the candle flames in their hands were extinguished, the individuals in the square wouldn't be plunged into darkness, and there wouldn't be any trace of their presence erased.

“Yes.” Lumian smiled.

He handed the white candle to Franca and approached the mottled pillar adorned with symbols like the Sun Sacred Emblem, sunflowers, and radiating lines. He extended his arms reverently and offered a sincere prayer.

“Praise the Sun!”

His plan was to utilize the catacombs' uniqueness and the protective power of the sacrificial square to suppress the influence of the Sauron family's residual bloodline and the corruption of Inevitability within his body.

From his experiences, a substantial part of these influences stemmed from external sources and the outside world. For instance, the sealed Vermonda Sauron deep within the underground palace and the power of Inevitability beyond the barrier.

Without these external influences, all that would remain was the corruption within his body. Lumian had endured this during his previous three advancements and believed it was manageable. This was because the external support this corruption received would be weakened by the catacombs' uniqueness and the protection of the sacrificial pillars.

The initial idea for this plan had been inspired by the creation of the Beyonder accessory, Beatrice's Necklace. Madam Magician had mentioned that specific environments could sever connections and prevent the power of a boon from returning to its source, such as the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring.

Lumian believed that although the sacrificial square in the catacombs might not be as special as the area around the Samaritan Women's Spring, it wouldn't be too far off. After considering the catacombs' peculiarity and the protection of the Eternal Blazing Sun sacrificial pillar, the external influence would undoubtedly be significantly reduced.

Furthermore, the sanctity of the sacrificial square stemmed from the protection of orthodox gods. Lumian didn't need to worry about any backlash from consuming the potion to advance here.

Franca watched in momentary surprise as Lumian genuinely praised the Sun.

He was truly under the “watchful eye” of a deity!

But isn't he afraid of being directly purged as a follower of Mr. Fool?

After the prayer, Lumian returned to Franca and handed her an exquisite perfume bottle.

“What's this?” Franca inquired, puzzled.

“Gray amber perfume,” Lumian explained with a flicker of emotion in his eyes under the candlelight. “After I consume the potion, watch my reaction closely. If you sense anything amiss, unscrew the cap and bring the bottle to my nose.”

Initially, he would have done this himself, but this time, given the influence of the Sauron family's residual bloodline and his status as a Mid-Sequence Beyonder, he was concerned that the situation might worsen. He might not have the strength to open the perfume bottle. Additionally, if he had used it from the beginning, his subconscious might remember that he had created it, potentially negating the intended effect.

“Alright.” Seeing that Lumian had no intention of explaining, Franca suppressed her curiosity and refrained from inquiring.

Lumian glanced at the broad stone steps leading to the catacombs' second level and added,

“One more thing, you need to ensure that the tourists don't disturb me.”

“Do you think I'm stupid?” Franca rolled her eyes.

Did you really need to ask?

Without further delay, Lumian retrieved a beer mug with a crystal-like appearance from his satchel.

Using a measuring cylinder, he began the process. First, he poured a total of 80 milliliters of the wax statue artisan's dark-red blood into the mug. Then, he added the mutated black spider's poison gland, 10 grams of amber powder, and two white oak fruits he had collected over a month ago.

These ingredients, infused with potent spirituality and corresponding symbols, didn't dissolve instantly; instead, they created a dark foam on the surface.

Lumian gently submerged the blood-colored object that resembled a shrunken human brain and the withered, black heart into the mixture.



With a sizzling sound, a crimson-tinged mist diffused and then receded. All the solid ingredients rapidly disintegrated and merged, causing the potion's color to intensify.

Bubbles rose and burst until the liquid inside the beer mug turned an iron-black hue, with a tinge of reddish rust.

Observing this transformation, Franca mumbled softly, "Indeed, one's heart is tainted when one employs battle strategies. Even the potion is tainted..."

Contemplating the dark, blood-colored concoction, Lumian removed his satchel and military flask, setting them aside.

After handing Lie to Franca, he took a slow, deliberate breath and composed himself.

After 20 to 30 seconds, he sat cross-legged, his wrist steady as he picked up the beer mug and drank the potion without hesitation.

The potion had a strong rusty taste, cold like a serpent slithering in the darkness, slippery and icy.

However, Lumian's body didn't burn as it had before. Instead, he felt a chilling sensation, as if all the flames had been absorbed by the potion.

Simultaneously, his head throbbed with a familiar pain, and his vision quickly blurred. All the thoughts and information he knew materialized, intertwining in the form of miniature pictures, forming layers of interconnected spiderwebs.

This tore Lumian's mind apart. Terrifying ravings, seemingly emanating from an infinite distance while simultaneously echoing in his ears, were accompanied by violent and frenzied emotions.

Yet, the pain from the former didn't render Lumian nearly unconscious. He instinctively rolled, his expression involuntarily contorted with malevolence. His hands clenched tightly, and he couldn't help but groan in pain. The latter was within the tolerance of an Alms Monk.

Lumian's right palm felt a slight warmth from the stimulation.

Finally, the inferno reached him. This time, it converged within Lumian's mind, unreal and illusory.

Franca, who had been watching closely, wanted to open the perfume bottle several times, but each time she thought about it, Lumian returned to normal.

The entire ordeal lasted only 20 to 30 seconds. Lumian's clenched hands slowly relaxed, and his contorted facial muscles gradually returned to their original positions.

Phew... Lumian exhaled a scorching breath and opened his eyes.

"Did it work?" Franca asked subconsciously.

Lumian, experiencing sharp pain in his head and body, responded with a wry smile, "If it hadn't worked, you would've already started fighting the out-of-control me."

This had been even easier than his previous three advancements.

"Who knows if a Conspirer's loss of control is an act of pretending to be a normal person and secretly attacking me..." Franca couldn't help but argue, even though she knew she had spoken out of turn.

Lumian raised his hand to rub his temples. Despite the pain, his thoughts seemed clearer than ever. He quickly recalled the events that had occurred and sensed that some of the details might be problematic.

This was something he hadn't noticed before.

For instance, according to his nightmares, Iraeta, the poet who frequently participated in King's Pie games, should have transformed into a half-wax statue, gone insane, harmed himself or those around him at any moment. Yet, not only was he unscathed, but he had also entered the problematic Sacred Heart Cloister and coincidentally encountered Albus Medici!

#### Chapter 435 An Early Acting Principle

In the nightmare, Poet Iraeta failed to escape his deranged fate. It's not that he isn't affected by the King's Pie game, but that he hasn't shown it yet. Just like Painter Mullen and Novelist Anori...

In other words, the likelihood of him already being anomalous is very low, nothing like Elros and Albus...

He has a facilitator behind him, ensuring his current safety and allowing him to transmit effective information? If that's the case, who is the facilitator? Someone from the Sacred Heart Cloister? Did he make many similar arrangements after discovering the turbulent undercurrents in the cloister? Lumian's thoughts raced faster than usual, and he quickly made a guess.

He retracted his thoughts and focused on observing the changes in his body after consuming the potion.

In addition to his enhanced insight, sharper and clearer thinking, and a series of specific manifestations, like improved intelligence and the ability to fabricate excuses to convince others, he also had superpowers in misdirection, confusion, and deception.

These abilities were core components of conspiracies, but a qualified Conspirer would only employ them subtly and at critical moments. Under normal circumstances, they tried their best to rely on their wits to prevent targets with backgrounds from detecting the existence of superpowers and seeing through their schemes.

Similar to Misleading, there's another ability called Incitement or Instigation. This is very much like the Demoness' Instigation. And when Lumian played Pyromaniac, he consciously incited others to ignite the flames in their hearts.

Lumian couldn't help but mutter, Is my acting too advanced, or is the Hunter pathway deepening in certain concepts? Is acting in a previous stage an ability at the later stages?

Yes, the Conspirer potion revolves around conspiracies. There's no qualitative improvement in combat...

After repeated confirmation, Lumian realized that his physique had improved to a certain extent, and his precise control over flames had improved. He no longer had to rely on Fire Raven, Fireball, Spear, Fire Serpent, and Fire Wall every time. He could casually shape the flames into different forms, such as whips and sabers.

Similarly, the difficulty of repeatedly compressing the crimson flames to form incandescent white flames decreased. The time required was significantly reduced and, depending on the flame's specific appearance and energy density, it ranged from one to three seconds.

In addition, Lumian could temporarily merge his body with fire. He could use fireballs and other projectiles to quickly shift positions, either escaping the enemy's attack range or closing the distance. This allowed Lumian to have more options in battle. He didn't have to rely on Spirit World Traversal every time.

Conspirer had also enhanced his spirituality. Although Lumian hadn't experimented, he believed that at his limit, he could complete Spirit World Traversal six times, up from the original four times.

Lumian sniffed and unsurprisingly caught a whiff of something further away, discerning more details.

This was due to the enhancement of a Conspirer's information-gathering abilities. It would inevitably enhance their five senses and spiritual perception.

That's about it... Lumian stood up, his body suddenly enveloped in flowing crimson flames.

He transformed into a fireball and flew away with a whoosh.

In less than ten meters, he landed on the ground, and flames dispersed around him.

The current limit is ten meters. It will gradually increase as the potion is digested... Lumian nodded indiscernibly and returned to the spot where he had discarded the black satchel and the military flask.

He was now fully aware that he was already a Sequence 6 Conspirer.

Franca held Lie and the gray amber perfume and asked with curiosity and concern, "Very cool... How do you feel?"

Lumian pondered silently for a few seconds before saying, "The changes in my abilities aren't as much or as strong as I imagined."

"That's normal," Franca consoled, empathetic. "For most pathways, there are only two qualitative changes below the high Sequences. For the Hunter pathway, one is at Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, and the other is at Sequence 5 Reaper. Regardless, each potion brings about new abilities or strengthening of the original abilities. If used well, it's normal for a Sequence 6 to kill a Sequence 5."

Lumian nodded slowly, deep in thought.

"I also discovered that I've been acting as a Conspirer for a long time..."

When he was wandering, he relied on ruthlessness and conspiracies to fend off humans who were older than him for food and a place to sleep in the cold. When he was in Cordu, every prank could be regarded as a conspiracy with low malice. After leaving Cordu, he had been trapped in conspiracies over the past few months, either screwing over his targets or falling into the traps of others...

Although Lumian didn't digest a portion of the Conspirer potion on the spot, it made his condition much better compared to when he first consumed the Pyromaniac potion. The potion's potency didn't dissipate without control.

He didn't feel like a Conspirer who had just advanced after consuming a potion. He felt more like a Sequence 6 Beyonder who had some time to adapt to it.

Simultaneously, he deduced two acting principles from his past experiences:

Firstly, a Conspirer's core lay in their intelligence, not superpowers!

Secondly, the key to a conspiracy lay in concealing one's true motives!

In the past, the acting principles were derived step by step, leading to a substantial digestion of the potion. In contrast, these two acting principles were accumulated from past experiences. Although they couldn't directly result in the digestion of the potion, they facilitated Lumian's subsequent acting, reducing the time it would take for him to fully digest the potion. To put it simply, he might only need to spend half his energy to achieve twice the effect.

Lumian had originally believed that digesting the Conspirer potion would take at least half a year, but from the looks of it, perhaps three months would suffice. Of course, the prerequisite was that there would always be a chance to act and conclude a new acting principle.

Franca shared his sentiments.

“That's right. Just like how it was easy for me to act as an Assassin. I had too much 'experience.’”

When she said the word “experience,” her voice involuntarily softened, as if she felt a little guilty. Lumian paid no mind to this detail. After stuffing the items on the ground into his black satchel, he retrieved Lie, the gray amber perfume, and the burning white candle.

Seeing that her companion was indeed fine, Franca heaved a sigh of relief and said, “It's a good thing to advance before the catastrophe. Damn it, if it weren't for Browns Sauron being petty and jealous of me, preventing me from attending the orgies, my Pleasure potion would have been significantly digested. Hmph, I'll have her experience true pleasure later!”

For the 103rd time, she cursed Browns Sauron.

Franca then asked, “Are we going to make a move on those individuals next?”

These individuals referred to members of the Sinners organization.

Over the past month, Lumian had repeatedly sought to capture the Sinners' liaison through Guillaume Bénéte's widow, Paulina. First, he sought to uncover the Sanson family, seeking revenge for his sister and tracking Loki's whereabouts—they had a deep connection to Loki. Perhaps they knew the location of the castle where Loki had been resurrected. Second, the Sinners organization also believed in an evil god. It was possible they knew a little about Trier's cultists' abnormal silence. Perhaps it could help Lumian and the others figure out the source of the disaster and the essence of the outbreak.

Back then, Lumian hadn't figured out the pattern of the Sinners organization's liaison, so he had postponed any operation. Later, he planned to wait until he advanced to Sequence 6 and gained greater strength before taking action. After all, other members of the Sinners organization weren't

like Padre Guillaume Bénet, whose contract abilities and corresponding negative effects were grasped by him, allowing him to prepare in advance. If the contract abilities of the evil god bestowed synergized well, they would be quite a tough nut.

Of course, Lumian had no intention of completely annihilating the Sinners organization by relying solely on his small team. It was a cult with a saint. His plan was to capture the liaison and obtain the information he needed before calling the Tarot Club for reinforcements.

“That's right.” Lumian nodded with a smile and replied to Franca, “In two days, the Sinners' liaison will likely visit Madame Paulina again.”

“Yes, I hope he knows something.” Although Franca didn't think she could prevent the potential disaster, she still hoped to do something.

She paused for a moment and continued, “Take Jenna to Lavigny Docks tomorrow and introduce her to Mr. Fool's faith.”

“Alright.” Lumian had such thoughts to begin with.

The following morning, Lumian knocked on Apartment 601's door.

He glanced at Jenna, who had changed into a light-blue dress, and smiled.

“I need your help with something.”

“Me?” Jenna pointed at herself and turned to Franca. “How can I help?”

“Don't ask. You'll find out when you get there.” Lumian couldn't be bothered to find an excuse.

Jenna's eyes darted around in confusion.

“Dammit! Can't you make yourself clear?” As she cursed, she gestured to Franca, indicating her helplessness.

Then, she followed Lumian out of the apartment door.

Franca fell into deep thought when she saw this scene.

In the four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage, Lumian didn't mention the purpose of his trip. He chatted with Jenna about the drunkards at Salle de Bal Brise and the actors at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. The atmosphere was relaxed and cheerful, as if they were on a school autumn outing.

Jenna didn't inquire further and displayed considerable patience.

Finally, the rental carriage arrived at Lavigny Docks. Lumian paid the fare of 1.75 verl d'or, opened the door, and agilely leaped out.

Jenna moved to the carriage door, but before she could gracefully leap down, her eyes narrowed as she let out Franca's usual sigh.

“Wow!”

Lumian followed her gaze and saw an ancient-looking three-masted sailboat parked at Lavigny Docks, clearly lagging behind the times.

Such a boat was rare at Lavigny Docks, but those who had grown up reading or listening to the The Adventurer series found it oddly familiar.

These great pirates seemed to be fond of such boats.

#### Chapter 436 Open and Inclusive Faith

Lumian had seen a similar three-masted sailboat in the illustrations of The Adventurer series. It stood out amidst the bustling Lavigny Docks, a contrast to the inland steamboats, and drew the attention of passersby.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt a warmth in his right palm, which then subsided.

What's happening? Has the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor experienced a change under stimulus? This... this feels like a kind of resonance... Lumian pondered in surprise and confusion.

Could there be a connection between this ancient three-masted sailboat and Blood Emperor Alista Tudor?

As Lumian stared at the sailboat, Jenna disembarked from the carriage and playfully remarked, "You didn't bring me here just to show me this vintage pirate ship, did you?"

She had read the first two serialized volumes of The Adventurer series in the newspapers. Books had always been expensive in her family, and when her father's work-related compensation didn't arrive after his unfortunate death, her reading opportunities grew scarce. She'd occasionally find old newspapers used to paste on the wall or for other purposes and read until sunset.

With the presence of street bards and her mother's bedtime stories, her spirit remained far from desolate.

Since arriving in the market district and becoming an underground singer, Jenna had found a means to earn a substantial income. She had even saved up to purchase a pirated copy of The Adventurer series from an underground bookseller to finally appreciate the intricate illustrations. This endeavor often made her feel remorseful for Madam Fors Wall. She planned to buy an authentic set once she had cleared all her debts.

To her surprise, her debts only seemed to accumulate.

Lumian withdrew his gaze and replied with a teasing grin, "Consider this a bonus."

The two of them stood on the harbor's edge, discussing the disparities between the ancient sailboat and the illustrations from The Adventurer series.

After a while, Lumian led Jenna to the unassuming The Fool's cathedral.

Jenna looked up at the bell tower and steeple atop the four-story building, examining the silver symbol comprising an incomplete Pupil-less Eye and a section of Contorted Lines. Baffled, she inquired, "Is this a cathedral?"

Aren't cathedrals supposed to be grander?

The cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique was far more magnificent and sacred in comparison.

“Yes,” Lumian affirmed, leading the way inside.

Jenna trailed closely behind, increasingly surprised by the cathedral's simplicity.

The stained glass windows were scarce, and there was no ornate gilding to be found. The cathedral lacked intricate machinery. The only semblance of religion lay in the massive murals, which seemed to favor muted colors and subdued illumination.

The most striking feature of the cathedral was the large, numerous windows. Even on the ground floor, the interior was awash with natural light.

Jenna's gaze flitted over the murals, and she instinctively felt that they symbolized guidance and redemption.

It was slightly past 10 a.m., and the cathedral's attendance was sparse. It was silent, exuding a sense of serenity.

Lumian guided Jenna to the third row of pews facing the altar.

He surveyed their surroundings, his gaze resting on The Fool's Sacred Emblem before him. In a solemn tone, he disclosed,

“You should be aware that Franca and I are keeping something from you. There are some secrets we haven't shared with you.”

“Yeah,” Jenna nodded gently, awaiting Lumian's explanation.

Lumian continued, “As you can tell, Franca and I aren't related. She and my sister Aurore are close friends who share common interests. Loki and I Know Someone, whom we dealt with previously, are also part of this group, but they betrayed others, causing a disaster in Cordu and costing my sister her life.”

“I see...” Jenna replied, having refrained from delving too deeply previously but having a vague understanding.

Lumian's gaze remained fixed on Mr. Fool's altar.

“There's another connection between Franca and me. We don't believe in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery...”

Jenna couldn't help but chuckle.

“I've already guessed it. When have any of you gone to church? I don't usually see you praying at fixed times!

“At least you know which street Église Saint-Robert is on. Franca might not even know where the cathedral's door opens to.”

She, on the other hand, prayed, listened to the sermons, and attended Mass at least once a week. This was both a display of piety to the Purifiers and a habit of faith from all these years.

The only downside was that she often sang at Salle de Bal Brise until midnight before returning to Rue des Blouses Blanches to sleep. She couldn't get up to welcome the morning sun and dawn, so she could only set a fixed prayer time for noon.

“No, I'm not going because I'm a wanted criminal. I can barely be considered a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun,” Lumian replied with a smile. Then, he said solemnly, “Franca and I believe in this orthodox god, the great Mr. Fool.”

Lumian pressed his hand to his chest and whispered solemnly, “Praise The Fool!”  
The Fool... Jenna found the deity's name peculiar.

After a moment of thought, she asked, “The Fool from tarot cards?”

“Yes, you've guessed it correctly,” Lumian affirmed.

Jenna spotted a tall figure in a black trench coat and a half top hat approaching the altar. She instinctively lowered her head and said with a hint of smugness,

“I've discovered almost ten decks of tarot cards from Franca, and she doesn't usually use them for divination.”

That fellow... Could it be that she thought it would be cool to toss a Two of Cups on the corpse after taking out a target, so she made preparations? The more Lumian considered it, the more he felt that this was Franca's style.

Jenna paused for a moment and asked, “Does The Fool Pharmaceutical Company also belong to the Church of The Fool?”

“Uh...” Lumian was momentarily caught off guard.

He hadn't given it much thought. Initially, he believed the pharmaceutical company was named after tarot cards.

Now, it appeared that The Fool from the tarot cards seemed to equal Mr. Fool!

Lumian hesitated before responding, “Maybe.”

He wasn't entirely certain if The Fool Pharmaceutical Company was affiliated with the Church of The Fool or if it was simply a venture by a member of the Tarot Club.

Jenna demonstrated her keen insight as she inquired, “You brought me here not only because it's a safe place for discussing your faith but also to show that the Church of The Fool is a recognized, mainstream church capable of constructing a cathedral in Trier.”

“You're not as naive as you appear,” Lumian turned his head and smiled. “My third purpose is to ask if you'd consider converting to Mr. Fool?”

“Convert...” Jenna's mind was in a whirl.

Lumian adopted a persuasive tone, saying, “This doesn't conflict with your contract with the Purifiers. Mr. Fool is an orthodox god acknowledged by all the Churches. However, the propagation of this faith is concentrated on the maritime islands and certain regions of the Southern Continent. Most people in the Northern Continent are unaware of it.”



“But...” Jenna hesitated. “I’ve never thought about changing my faith...”

Her faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun couldn't be described as devout or fanatical, but it was a habit she had cultivated since childhood. She had also accepted most of the teachings. Until today, the idea of conversion had never crossed her mind. She didn't feel a strong urge to change her faith, nor did she harbor any deep dissatisfaction with the Church.

The only times she'd voiced discontent were during the most challenging years her family endured, especially after her mother's passing. At those moments, she occasionally grumbled about the Eternal Blazing Sun, feeling that He didn't protect true believers. However, these moments were far from sufficient to motivate a conversion.

Lumian glanced at Jenna's face and offered a reassuring smile.

“It's entirely fine if you don't want to convert. I'm merely suggesting it. My main concern is ensuring that if you ever find yourself separated from us during the impending disaster, you know this place is a refuge. Don't worry, even if you're a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, Mr. Fool's Church will welcome you and provide protection.”

Jenna seemed puzzled and asked, “Then why can't I go to Église Saint-Robert?”

Lumian collected his thoughts and explained, “Franca and I share the same faith and work for a secret organization. Two days ago, we received information from the organization.

“There's a problem with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Sacred Heart Cloister, similar to the issues with the Deep Valley Cloister of the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

“In such a situation, some cathedrals may not be trustworthy, and you might not be able to distinguish between the reliable and the unreliable. So, it's better to choose those that are known to be reliable.”

Jenna had personally experienced the troubles at the Deep Valley Cloister, so she understood the significance of potential problems in the Sacred Heart Cloister.

She murmured to herself, “Could the catastrophe begin from within the Churches?”

“Perhaps,” Lumian replied, though he couldn't provide a definitive answer.

At that moment, a towering figure, dressed in a custom-made black trench coat and a half top hat, approached Lumian and Jenna. He stood at a towering 2.56 meters, with golden hair and eyes.

He looked at Jenna and asked with a warm smile, “Sister, is this your first visit to my lord's cathedral?”

“Yes, but I'm here with a friend,” Jenna replied. She instinctively resisted the idea of converting her faith and inquired, “And who are you?”

“I am the bishop here, Teslian,” the half-giant introduced himself with a confident smile.

Jenna observed his attire, which looked far from conventional clergy attire.

Teslian turned his gaze to Lumian and continued, "Would you be interested in hearing me introduce our beacon and savior, the great Mr. Fool?"

"Don't worry. Our lord doesn't compel people to convert, and he doesn't mind if they believe in him alongside other deities. In turn, believing in him can also coexist with other beliefs."

"You... you can do that?" Jenna stammered.

This was completely beyond her understanding!

Which deity would allow their followers to have impure or multiple beliefs?

Additionally, why refer to this deity as 'him' instead of 'Him'? The latter is the exclusive pronoun for deities! Why address this deity as 'mister'?

Jenna's mind was filled with questions, and her thoughts were in disarray.

"Yes, Mr. Fool is known for his compassion and benevolence," the bishop responded, seeing that Jenna and Lumian didn't object. He then opened the black Bible with silver patterns and began to preach.

#### Chapter 437 Cashing Out

Jenna remained indifferent during the initial part of the sermon, finding it reminiscent of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Holy Bible.

However, her attention perked up when The Fool requested to be addressed as "him" rather than "Him." This slight change in expression indicated her growing focus.

As the sermon continued, Jenna's surprise became evident, and her face revealed a mix of shock and intrigue.

Is Gehrman Sparrow, the adventurer, truly connected to The Fool's Church?

Could he be an angelic messenger delivering The Fool's message of redemption?

Jenna wondered amidst her astonishment. Teslian, the half-giant bishop, didn't press her about her belief in The Fool but instead turned his attention to a supplicant deeply immersed in prayer.

The supplicant appeared to be a sailor in his prime from the sea. His skin was bronze, and his face bore obvious signs of the elements. His hair was disheveled and dark-blue, and Jenna couldn't see his features due to his bowed head in prayer.

Dressed in the same linen shirt, brown jacket, and loose dark pantaloons favored by sailors and pirates, he also sported a unique belt adorned with a dagger, telescope, and various tools.

He's probably a captain. He looks quite dignified... Lumian retracted his gaze and looked at Jenna.

Jenna, still processing the revelations, rose in a daze and left the cathedral. She wandered aimlessly along the harbor district's edge.

Lumian followed, hands in his pockets, refraining from immediate persuasion.

After walking for nearly ten minutes, Jenna slowed down and muttered to herself, “No wonder you claim to be a shallow believer in God.”

The God referred to the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Lumian replied with a smirk, “You can also be a shallow believer in Mr. Fool. He doesn't concern himself with such matters.”

“I... I'll think about it,” Jenna replied, her beliefs shaken by the unconventional sermon. It wasn't that the Bible was well-written; rather, The Fool's claims and the Church of The Fool's approach differed significantly from her previous teachings. She now hesitated and struggled with her faith.

Lumian glanced at her and didn't incessantly persuade her.

In such situations, it was crucial to know when to stop, as excessive attempts could lead to resistance and repulsion.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian sighed inwardly.

As expected, proselytizing needs to be done by professionals...

Given my friendship with Jenna, she didn't hesitate to reject my suggestion to convert. However, the bishop's sermon had stirred something within her, causing her to reconsider her stance...

The two of them continued in silence for another 10 to 20 meters, with Lumian stealing glances at the bustling harbor and the deserted streets nearby. He casually asked, “How's your progress with gathering the Witch potion ingredients?”

Jenna was caught off guard by the question.

“I only digested the Instigator potion two days ago. How could I have gathered the main ingredient for the Witch potion so quickly?”

Perhaps it was the residual influence of the cathedral, but Jenna's urge to curse wasn't as pronounced.

Lumian dropped a bombshell. “Well, I digested the Pyromaniac potion yesterday and managed to acquire both the main ingredient and the supplementary ingredients for the Conspirer potion on the same day.”

Jenna couldn't help but exclaim, “Dammit! How can we be the same? I want a special hunting ground for hunting and digestion too!”

Franca had already informed her of Lumian's encounter in Red Swan Castle, excluding Magician's response.

Jenna found it surreal.

Just last night, they were both at Sequence 8 and Sequence 7 respectively, and the gap wasn't that significant. Why did the things they experienced differ so much, as if they were worlds apart?

One of them still dwelled on the fringes of mysticism, occasionally encountering the horrifying bizarre. The other had delved deep into the mysteries, surrounded by secrecy and danger.

After venting her frustration, Jenna disclosed, "I asked the Purifiers, and they don't seem very supportive of my advancement to become a Witch. They won't pay me in advance for the main ingredients. They claimed there's no pressing need for my investigations at the moment. However, they did promise to sell me the main ingredients and the more elusive supplementary ingredients at a discount if I can raise the funds. The main ingredients alone cost 16,000 verl d'or each."

A discounted price... Besides, does this promise mean that the Purifiers have every main ingredient for the Witch potion? I thought they only had converged Beyonder characteristics. After all, their method of obtaining Witch-related items should involve hunting... Does the Eternal Blazing Sun Church have a way to restore Beyonder characteristics to main ingredients? Lumian didn't quite understand.

Turning his gaze to the road, Lumian pondered and asked, "Do you owe Franca 60,000 verl d'or now?"

"Yes, I do." Jenna fretted at the mention of it. I wonder when I'll be able to pay it back."

Lumian chuckled.

"In that case, would you like to owe a bit more?"

"Huh?" Jenna's thoughts froze.

With his hands still in his pockets, Lumian grinned.

"Owe me 35,000 verl d'or, and I'll help you gather all the ingredients for the Witch potion."

Jenna, intrigued, inquired, "D-do you actually know where to find them?"

Lumian chuckled.

"I'm not entirely certain, but there's a good chance."

He intended to exchange it from the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

Yesterday, he had received recognition from Gardner Martin for his adventure in Red Swan Castle's underground maze, and this contribution could be redeemed immediately or accumulated for higher Sequence potions. Lumian hadn't made up his mind on how to use it yet, but now he decided to utilize it to get all the ingredients for Jenna's Witch potion.

He might need to fork out some money, but disaster could strike at any moment. He might not remain with the Iron and Blood Cross Order in the future. Converting his contribution into a tangible reward made sense.

Moreover, the items gained through such contributions were of lesser value compared to having a willing, living Witch's assistance.

When the time came, with Conspirer Lumian, Demoness of Pleasure Franca, and Witch Jenna working together, they could form a formidable team even among official factions and the

Inquisition. Combined with the appropriate mystical items, they could handle most Beyonders below the demigod level. Additionally, they had an unofficial member—Psychiatrist Anthony Reid.

Lumian believed that Gardner Martin likely had the necessary Witch potion ingredients. After all, the Iron and Blood Cross Order primarily followed the Hunter pathway, which was closely related to the Assassin pathway. Over the years, it was improbable that no convergence effect had occurred.

If needed, Lumian could also seek assistance from Mr. K and Madam Magician.

Jenna fell silent, unable to respond immediately.

Lumian chuckled again.

“It's not a good thing to owe me. In addition to repaying the principal, you have to pay interest, which is helping me with certain tasks. Fortunately, you'll soon have an opportunity to do so.”

Jenna pursed her lips and exhaled slowly.

“Alright, I'll give you 10,000 verl d'or first, so I'll only owe you 25,000.”

“No problem,” Lumian agreed indifferently.

Seeing that Jenna was about to say something, he chuckled and said, “No need to thank me...”

He then lowered his voice and feigned a feminine voice. “We're friends, after all!”

“...” Jenna struggled to find the words. “Dammit!”

Lumian simply chuckled and said nothing.

Jenna, on the other hand, silently followed him across the street toward a few rental carriages parked there.

As they boarded the carriage, Jenna suddenly muttered to herself, “Thank you.”

Lumian appeared to be in his own world, occupying a seat in the carriage and disregarding his image.

In the afternoon, at 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Lumian spotted Gardner Martin, dressed in a shirt and sweater.

Lumian got straight to the point, saying, “Boss, I wish to exchange my contributions for the Witch potion or all the corresponding ingredients.”

Gardner Martin, without displaying any surprise, looked at Lumian with a smile and inquired, “Who is the Witch potion for?”

Lumian replied candidly, “It's for Jenna.”

Gardner Martin appeared to be listening and gestured for Lumian to continue.

Lumian said sincerely, “I'm looking for a reliable ally with considerable strength.”

At this point, he smiled. “Moreover, I want to experience genuine pleasure.”

Gardner Martin burst into laughter.

“Not bad. That's what an ambitious Hunter should aim for.

“No problem. Come by tomorrow morning to collect the Beyonder characteristics and supplementary ingredients. Oh, and make up the difference with another 10,000 verl d'or.”

Gardner Martin understood that Lumian and Jenna had a close relationship with mutual trust. Furthermore, Lumian and Franca's cooperation didn't involve seeking pleasure.

Lumian responded with a smile, “Thank you, Commanding Officer.”

After leaving Rue des Fontaines and returning to Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian finally had some free time after a long day of activity.

In the evening, he enjoyed La Fée Verte while listening to Jenna, dressed as Showy Diva, singing passionately to earn money. His mind wandered.

How much can a local singer earn? It's only a few thousand verl d'or a year...

It's still better to fleece the Iron and Blood Cross Order and hunt heretics... When Jenna becomes a Witch, she'll have the strength to participate in battles at this level...

Speaking of which, I didn't think much of it when I read The Adventurer series in the past. Now that I think about it, doesn't Gehrman Sparrow spend most of his time hunting pirates with Beyonder characteristics? How can he become a famous pirate or a great pirate without Beyonder characteristics?

Yes, although the corresponding battles are vague and exaggerated, only highlighting the main points, it's obvious that the author has a certain understanding of Beyonder battles. Is Madam Fors Wall also a Beyonder?

Relaxing until nearly midnight, Lumian returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As soon as he pushed open Room 207's door, he saw a square of letter on the table under the crimson moonlight.

Madam Magician's letter... Lumian lit the carbide lamp and unfolded the letter.

“Mr. Hanged Man hopes that you and the Two of Cups can summon the Armored Shadow again soon. He'll be responsible for providing the gold.

“Let me know when you've confirmed the time.”

#### Chapter 438 Ghost Ship

Mr. Hanged Man is ready... Lumian took out his golden pocket watch and opened it to take a look.

He could summon the Armored Shadow at any moment. His only concern was that it might pose a danger. Summoning it without a good reason could lead to an attack or a curse. However, with The Hanged Man—the Major Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club—present, there was no need to worry about such matters.

The uncertainty now lay in Franca's availability. After all, she had to translate.

Lumian burned the letter and left Auberge du Coq Doré, heading straight for Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

“Why are you here so late?” Franca clearly wasn't the early-to-bed type.

Lumian glanced at Jenna, who had just finished removing her heavy makeup, and smiled at Franca.

“Do you have time tonight? We can summon the Armored Shadow again and ask it questions.”

Summon the Armored Shadow again... Franca's eyes lit up as she blurted out, “I'm free!”

The Armored Shadow was most likely from her homeland, involving the secret of their transmigration and their way back. Even at 6 a.m., she would say she had time to be a translator, let alone just midnight!

Noticing Jenna's confusion and curiosity, Franca explained excitedly, “Didn't Ciel ask us to gather information on spirit world creatures that fulfill the summoning conditions? One of the summoning targets he chose had a directional ambiguity when designing the summoning incantation, attracting a very peculiar spirit world creature. The ability to snort and spit you saw earlier came from a contract with that spirit world creature.”

Out of jealousy and envy, Franca described the Spell of Harrumph as snorting and spitting.

Jenna had a deep impression of the Spell of Harrumph and found its effects potent and mystical. Her initial reaction was to ask, “Is it possible for us to sign a contract with similar spirit world creatures?”

“Sigh, I wish I had a similar contracted creature, but I can't obtain such a special contract,” Franca expressed her regret and resentment sincerely. “In short, that spirit world creature is very unique and involves many secrets. A big shot of the organization backing us—uh, a demigod—is very interested. And now, only Ciel can accurately summon the target creature through the contract's connection.”

Franca asked Lumian, “Is that person here?”

“Yes.” Lumian nodded gently.

Jenna looked at them thoughtfully and asked, “Is it Justice, Magician, or have The Star or The Moon arrived?”

Franca's expression froze, her mouth slightly agape, her eyes filled with disbelief. Lumian was taken aback. He didn't expect Jenna to reveal the code names of the Major Arcana card holders and make the connection that her two companions were related to them.

Amidst the indescribable silence, Jenna's brows relaxed, and she smiled.

“I guessed right! You guys belong to the secret organization that uses tarot cards as their code names!”

“H-how did you know?” Franca asked in surprise.

Jenna pursed her lips and sneered.

“You have nearly ten decks of tarot cards in this room, and you don't usually use them for divination. Then, Ciel told me that the Mr. Fool you believe in is roughly equivalent to The Fool in tarot cards. As for me, I've been attending mysticism gatherings recently and heard about the legend of Justice and the other Major Arcana card holders, as well as the existence of Minor Arcana cards.

“With so much information placed before me, if I don't make any connections and probe, won't I appear stupid?”

The more she spoke, the more pleased she became.

Franca was taken aback for a moment before saying, “Your Instigator potion wasn't wasted...”

“Excellent,” Lumian praised reluctantly. “You're prepared to drink the Witch potion.”

Without further ado, he left Apartment 601 with Franca. He planned to write a letter to Madam Magician at Auberge du Coq Doré, informing her that he could summon the Armored Shadow now.

Jenna watched them leave and muttered to herself, Witch... What would happen if a man drinks the Witch potion...

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

After Lumian sent the letter, he didn't extinguish the candle's flame and waited for a reply under the dual illumination.

Franca paced back and forth in the cramped room, feeling excited and a little nervous.

She yearned for clues about returning home via the Armored Shadow, but she feared that even her last hope would be obliterated.

Time ticked by. Just as the Demoness of Pleasure felt as if a year had passed, the candlelight in the room suddenly surged.

In the dim yellow flames the size of a human head, resplendent starlight flew out, enveloping Lumian and Franca.

It was as if they had arrived in the boundless cosmos, becoming abnormally insignificant.

After a brief moment of dizziness, Lumian and Franca realized that they had left Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré and arrived on a pitch-black deck.

The first thing they saw was an ancient triple mast, its grayish-white sails curled up like an open door.

The crimson moonlight fell from the sky, but it couldn't completely illuminate the area where Lumian and Franca were. It was dark, and the wooden planks were mottled, like an ancient haunted building.

Franca quickly surveyed the area and sighed with relief.

“Wow, an ancient sailboat.

“It's perfect for horror films!”



“What's a horror film?” Lumian asked casually.

Franca smiled awkwardly.

“A play depicting a ghost story.”

As she spoke, she touched the dark flaxen rope resting on the shipboard, as if trying to discern its exact era.

Suddenly, the rope came alive and nimbly wrapped around Franca's right hand, attempting to bind the Demoness of Pleasure.

A layer of black flames erupted, scorching the dark linen rope that seemed to possess a life of its own.

The rope snapped back, as if in pain.

Simultaneously, a rope that had been lying silently on the deck swung towards Lumian.

Lumian raised his slightly scorching right palm and grabbed the front of the rope.

The rope suddenly turned still, as if all its vitality had been drained.

All the ropes that had come back to life in this area returned to normal. They landed with a thud and stopped wriggling.

Lumian looked down at his right palm and muttered silently, The Blood Emperor's remnant aura on me faintly resonates with this ship...

These strange ropes became obedient when they felt the heat in my right palm...

Is this the ancient sailboat I saw at Lavigny Docks this morning?

Lavigny Docks... The Fool cathedral... Is this Mr. Hanged Man's ship?

Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made a guess.

Franca spun around and said excitedly, “This is a ghost ship, a ghost ship!

“It's alive to begin with!”

As the Demoness of Pleasure's voice reverberated across the deck, Lumian heard Madam Magician's words: “Mr. Hanged Man's ghost ship is a relic from the Tudor Empire. There are many unsolved secrets. When he rewards you, you can choose to explore this ship. As for when to embark on the exploration, it's up to you.”

As expected, it has something to do with the Tudor Empire... Lumian's resolve grew as he walked towards the cabin.

As Franca followed, she looked around curiously, touching and tapping here and there. Occasionally, she whispered, as if she wanted to communicate with Mr. Hanged Man's ghost ship.

Amidst the creaking sounds, a door in the cabin opened on its own.

A thick, dark-brown carpet covered the area, flanked by bookshelves and a liquor cabinet. Yellow-covered books and dark-red bottles of wine filled the space.

In front of the bookshelf stood a wide wooden table. On it were a variety of items—an ink bottle, a quill, a brass sextant, a black metallic telescope, and white candles.

Leaning against the desk stood a middle-aged man of average stature. His dark-blue hair was disheveled, and his skin was bronze and rough. He wore a linen shirt, a brown jacket, and loose dark pantaloons. He exuded a dignified aura. He was the supplicant Lumian had seen at The Fool cathedral that morning.

“Are you Mr. Hanged Man?” Lumian inquired.

The man in his prime nodded slightly.

“I’m The Hanged Man.”

Franca scrutinized the man and recalled that they were on a ghost ship. She immediately recalled something.

“Y-you’re Stormbringer Alger? Is this the Blue Avenger?” Franca blurted out in surprise and delight.

The Hanged Man glanced at her and replied expressionlessly, “You’ve heard of me?”

“Of course!” Franca praised sincerely. “You’re a maritime king without the title of a Pirate King. If you hadn’t fought the King of the Five Seas in the Fog Sea and caused the surrounding ships to experience a terrifying storm, no one would have known you were a demigod.

“Furthermore, you’re different from those pirates. You’re a genuine, unadulterated treasure hunter with lofty aspirations. You never plunder proper ships. You’ve been exploring the western borders of the Fog Sea, searching for the Lost City of Newins and the Solomon Empire’s inheritance.”

It wasn’t easy for her to hold back the words “you’re my idol.” She felt that it would appear to transcend the times. Franca had once dreamed of being a pure treasure hunter and sailing the Five Seas.

Stormbringer Alger... After Lumian discovered that Church of The Fool’s power center was at sea, he had consciously shared information about the Pirate Kings and Pirate Admirals with Franca. He knew that Alger, nicknamed Stormbringer, was a demigod captain, but he wasn’t a Pirate King. Therefore, his nickname didn’t include the term “king.” However, Vice Admiral Ailment, who had become a Pirate King, was now known as the Queen of Ailment.

As for the Lost City of Newins and the Solomon Empire’s legacy, they were treasure legends that had been popular in the Five Seas for many years.

At times, Lumian couldn’t help but admire Fors Wall, the author of The Adventurer series. She had the audacity to write erotic stories about the Pirate Kings.

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In the face of Franca's enthusiastic praise, The Hanged Man Alger fell silent for two seconds before saying,

“Maintaining a certain level of purity is both a good and a bad thing.

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### Chapter 439 Three Questions

With The Hanged Man present, Lumian didn't need to worry about an attack from the Armored Shadow. Instead, he followed a straightforward procedure: creating a protective wall of spirituality and summoning the Armored Shadow as if beckoning a messenger.

Before the candle's dark-green flame, an indistinct shadow silently hovered in midair, adorned in pitch-black armor adorned with golden fish scales.

The contorted faces on the scales twisted ferociously, wordlessly expressing their agony, which had transformed into a deep-seated hatred and malice toward all living beings around them.

The Hanged Man Alger, dressed as a sailor, took a step forward, and subtle silver lightning bolts crackled from the wall of spirituality.

In an instant, they materialized out of thin air, causing Lumian and Franca's skin to prickle.

Amidst the oppressive calm preceding the impending storm, the myriad transparent faces on the Armored Shadow returned to their silence, but their malevolent gazes persisted.

Lumian fixed his gaze on the six radiant gold bars on the altar, steadying himself. In Hermes, he spoke, "I offer a sacrifice. Please answer three questions."

The blurry faces on the Armored Shadow's form shifted their attention to the glowing gold, silently conveying their agreement to Lumian.

Lumian then nodded at The Hanged Man.

After a brief pause, The Hanged Man posed his first question, "Who are you?"

Lumian repeated the query in Hermes. As his contracted creature, the Armored Shadow would only engage in communication under these circumstances.

After a moment of silence, the Armored Shadow spoke in a language that only Franca could barely decipher.

"I am Chen Tu, the God of Ghost Suppression, imperially conferred by the Celestial Master."

Celestial Master... Franca paused, considering her words carefully.

"His last name is Chen and his first name is Tu; he holds the title of the God of Ghost Suppression, which was granted by the leader of Daoism. He is responsible for suppressing evil spirits."

"What is Daoism?" The Hanged Man inquired after some thought.

"What does 'imperially conferred' mean?" Lumian turned to Franca and asked in Intisian.

To him, referring to as an '-ism', regardless of the prefix, seemed no different from the Church of The Fool or the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

Franca appeared troubled.

"It's a complex topic. We can discuss it later. I'm afraid the Armored Shadow may not have the patience to wait."

That's true... Lumian cast his gaze at Mr. Hanged Man.

The Hanged Man paused briefly before asking the second question, which Lumian translated into Hermes. "What makes the eastern sea so special?"

In a deep and solemn tone, the Armored Shadow replied, "In the East Sea, there's a long-lost immortal mountain known as Penglai."

Penglai... It's really my homeland... Franca was delighted by this revelation. Her translation speed increased as she continued, "On the eastern sea, there's a mountain peak inhabited by various powerful warlocks and unique deities. It has been lost to history, and its name is Penglai."

Both Lumian and The Hanged Man found these words to be straightforward and didn't raise any further questions.

After a brief pause, The Hanged Man Alger asked in a deliberate manner, "Have there been any unusual occurrences in the eastern sea in recent years?"



In recent years? How could the Armored Shadow be aware of recent events when he was suspected to have been killed by the Underworld Daoist, imprisoned by his side, and transported to the Yellow Springs millennia ago? It's a time when the Blood Emperor had just perished or recently perished. Franca quietly mused on this but refrained from correcting The Hanged Man.

Lumian repeated the question, and the Armored Shadow responded with a cold tone, "A corpse from Penglai floated over via the river..."

Franca was taken aback and quickly translated, "The mountain called Penglai has reappeared. A powerful warlock or special deity residing on it has perished, and their corpse drifted to a place that might be the River Styx! It's—it's the river where Blood Emperor Alista Tudor was suppressed by Underworld Daoist. It's the source of the Samaritan Women's Spring!"

Does this mean that the eastern sea of the world where the Armored Shadow resides has undergone an abnormality in recent years? The long-vanished divine mountain, Penglai, has reappeared, and powerful Beyonders residing there have perished? Has the mountain known as Penglai always stood tall in the East Sea, or does it only appear occasionally? Lumian yearned to inquire further, but he couldn't ask any more questions due to the rules pertaining to summoning.

The six gold bars on the altar disintegrated, turning into sparkling specks of light that merged with the pitch-black fish-scale armor.

This time, nearly one-fifth of the armor plates turned golden and radiant.

The Hanged Man observed as the Armored Shadow faded into the dark-green candle flame. He remained silent, lost in thought, his intentions unclear.

Lumian completed the ritual and swiftly tidied up the altar. Turning to Franca, he said, "You can explain the terms in the first answer."

You're killing me! Franca grumbled silently and pondered for a moment before saying, "An imperial conferment is equivalent to a boon. Yes, a boon!"

"This Armored Shadow named Chen Tu was granted a position within the Church or a deity's kingdom. Through this role, he gained the corresponding powers to suppress evil spirits.

"It's not a direct gift from a deity but rather a ceremonial act performed by the leader of that school of thought, acting on behalf of the deity and bestowing a specific title."

Lumian listened attentively and started to grasp the concept of imperial conferment.

This more structured boon system not only linked the power of boons to a specific role but also emphasized the role of the deity's proxy.

Franca exhaled and said, "That's the basic idea. There are many more intricacies if you delve deeper into it. It's a complex topic that can't be fully explained in a short time. Terms like the Heavenly Court, the Netherworld, Ritual Protocols, Receiving Scriptures, and others are related, but I'm not well-versed in all of them. My knowledge is limited to individual terms."

Seeing Mr. Hanged Man and Lumian still staring at her, her heart skipped a beat.

"You really want me to explain all of it?"

The Hanged Man nodded slightly.

“I understand it might be challenging to explain on the spot, and there may be inaccuracies. You can take your time to recollect and organize the information when you return. It might be helpful to put it in writing and convey it to me through your Major Arcana card holder.”

“Alright.” Franca was relieved that The Hanged Man was understanding and accommodating. He seemed skilled at considering things from another person's perspective. She then grumbled silently,

Why did I agree so quickly...

The Hanged Man exuded a sense of dignity without arrogance as he smiled and said, “Once you've prepared the written information, you can think about what kind of compensation you'd like.”

Franca had several desires, including a mystical item similar to the Spell of Harrumph, a Sealed Artifact that could enable teleportation, and the Sequence 5 Demoness of Affliction potion formula.

She found herself in a dilemma, as she had considered the reward in advance and had almost forgotten to explain the term “Daoism” until Lumian reminded her.

After careful consideration, Franca provided a succinct explanation, “Daoism is a school of thought that venerates the natural laws and the corresponding philosophy that shapes them into unique deities for worship. Their leader is called the Celestial Master, which essentially means a teacher who comprehends the world's operating laws and spreads that knowledge. The ‘ways of heaven’ refers to the operating laws and corresponding philosophy of the world I mentioned earlier.”

Lumian attempted to distill the main point, asking, “So, Celestial Masters are akin to leaders like pontiffs, popes, chief shepherds, and matriarchs, with different titles depending on the denomination?”

Franca hesitated for a moment before confirming, “You could put it that way.”

As long as one didn't contemplate joining Daoism, this simplified explanation was sufficient to understand the basic concept.

Lumian nodded.

“It seems like a Celestial Master and an Underworld Daoist are on a similar level.”

“I agree,” Franca agreed.

During their conversation, The Hanged Man, Alger, rarely interrupted. He mostly listened quietly, occasionally expressing his thoughts or asking questions, which allowed the conversation to flow smoothly. Lumian and Franca shared a lot of information in one go.

Finally, the Major Arcana card holder looked at Lumian and asked, “The Armored Shadow's three answers have been very helpful. What would you like as a reward?”

Very helpful? Apart from allowing us to gain a better understanding of that world and know that the missing Penglai divine mountain has reappeared, there's nothing of practical use... Lumian kept to

Madam Magician's advice and said without hesitation, "I would like the opportunity to explore this ghost ship."

Franca was surprised by Lumian's request. Her initial shock was quickly replaced by excitement.

I want it too. I want the opportunity to pilot the ghost ship and study it!

The Hanged Man glanced at Lumian and remarked, "As I expected, you've already sensed the uniqueness of the Blue Avenger. It's one of the Tudor Empire's relics. Would you like to explore it now?"

Before Lumian could respond, the deep voice of Termiboros echoed in his mind, "Dangerous."

Danger... For real? Is Termiboros merely concerned about being implicated by me, so He warned me? Or is He afraid that I might gain something special during my exploration of the Blue Avenger, potentially disrupting Trier's potential catastrophe and foiling His scheme? Lumian was momentarily unsure if he should believe Termiboros's words.

Termiboros continued in a deep voice, "If you wish to resurrect Alista Tudor within your body, you can explore it now."

Lumian didn't pay much attention to Termiboros's words. He recalled Madam Magician's prior hint: I can decide when to begin the exploration...

Does this mean I should consider delaying it? Otherwise, why mention it at all? Just request the reward to be a chance of an exploration... Perhaps Aurore's philosophy of balance is at play here. My current negative effects are temporarily balanced, so there's no rush to strengthen the Blood Emperor's aura... As a Conspirer, Lumian quickly made a decision.

"Mr. Hanged Man, I'd like to explore the Blue Avenger at an opportune moment."

#### Chapter 440 Illusory Sigh

The Hanged Man agreed to Lumian's request and instructed him to contact him through Magician.

After expressing their gratitude, Lumian and Franca left the captain's cabin and followed the creaking wooden planks, just wide enough for three people to walk side by side. In the dim torchlight, they returned to the deck.

They noticed that Alger wasn't alone on the ghost ship, the Blue Avenger. A dozen sailors were scattered around, hiding in the shadows and making no attempts to approach.

Suddenly, Lumian and Franca witnessed a brilliant star hanging in front of them. It gleamed with an eerie, blue light, as though it had emerged from another realm.

The star expanded rapidly, as if it had descended to the ground in an instant. Its radiant glow enveloped everything in its vicinity.

Lumian and Franca blinked, momentarily blinded by the starlight. When their vision cleared, they found themselves back in Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré.

"absolutely stunning!" Franca exclaimed, her face brimming with longing.

She lamented the fact that her only option for switching paths was to become a Hunter, unable to experience the carefree life of an Apprentice. She could only hope to acquire a Sealed Artifact with similar abilities in the future.

Lumian, lost in thought, didn't echo Franca's praise.

Observing his contemplative demeanor, Franca couldn't help but voice her concerns, "Don't you find this situation a bit odd?"

"Gathering 100,000 verl d'or in gold should be a breeze for a treasure hunter as formidable as a Pirate King. Coming up with those three questions shouldn't take long, yet Mr. Hanged Man only sought you out to summon the Armored Shadow after all these days, and it happened after he arrived in Trier.

"Besides, Madam Magician could easily transport us to the sea and the Blue Avenger before sending us back. So, why wait for Mr. Hanged Man to arrive in Trier to do so?"

Lumian smiled, praising Franca's astute observation.

"You're quite perceptive this time. It seems that putting your brain to work has its benefits. Idleness can give the impression of a lack of intelligence."

"Dammit, are you praising me or insulting me?" Franca retorted, her brow furrowed. "Either Mr. Hanged Man was in some unique situation that prevented an individual from pinpointing his location, or he has other motives for being in Trier..."

At this point, Lumian and Franca both remembered the impending catastrophe and felt the ominous pressure of an approaching storm hanging over the city.

"Could the Tarot Club be dispatching more Major Arcana card holders to Trier? Perhaps to protect as many citizens as possible if we fail to avert the disaster?" Franca speculated.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully, refraining from argument.

After a moment of silence, Franca changed the topic with enthusiasm, exclaiming, "I want to become a demigod. I want to amass gold!"

Observing Lumian's inquisitive expression, Franca continued, driven by her desires, "That way, I can have you summon the Armored Shadow and ask the questions I've been itching to ask. No need to rely on the protection of Major Arcana card holders!"

"Then give it your all, Miss Pleasure," Lumian teased.

The next day, just before noon, Lumian returned from Rue des Fontaines. He led Jenna underground to the third level of the catacombs, arriving at a small square with two sacrificial pillars.

Puzzled, Jenna asked, "Why did you bring me here?"

If she didn't know Lumian well enough to understand his character, she might have suspected that her friend suddenly had sinister intentions.

Lumian, wearing a black satchel slung diagonally across him, stood confidently with his hands in his pockets. He smiled and explained, “I'm giving you the safest environment for your advancement.”

Having heard Franca's account and Madam Magician's words, Lumian had reason to believe that Sequence 0 of the Assassin pathway, the true goddess worshiped by the Demoness Sect, was likely a woman who had transformed from a man, and Her nature was deeply twisted.

It was said that this Primordial Demoness was driven by pain and a desire to replicate Her experiences through the generations. Consequently, She despised ordinary women who became Witches. Even the Demoness Sect hunted down female Assassins, female Instigators, and true Witches.

Given this context, Jenna's consumption of the Witch potion might be affected. After all, even the Hidden Sage, an existing occupying Sequence 0, could subtly influence every Beyonder of the Mystery Pryer pathway while they consumed the potion for their advancement. He whispered to them and imparted knowledge to them. There was no reason the true evil goddess, Primordial Demoness, couldn't exert significant influence on the Witches.

At lower Sequences, the influence shouldn't be too strong—even Aurore had advanced to Sequence 7 and become a Warlock under the Hidden Sage's constant whispers. However, it was better to be cautious. Since there was a way to reduce or weaken these influences, it made sense to do so.

Witches represented the first qualitative transformation of the Assassin pathway, perhaps even the core essence of Demoness. The Primordial Demoness, who sought to change men into women, would likely pay more attention to this particular Sequence advancement. Neither Franca nor Lumian wanted Jenna to take unnecessary risks.

Of course, Madam Magician had occasionally mentioned that this evil goddess wasn't in a stable state.

“The safest?” Jenna looked around, still somewhat unconvinced.

The surroundings were immersed in darkness, and corpses were scattered about. How did it seem safe?

Only the two weathered stone pillars appeared strangely warm and calming.

Lumian briefly explained the unique nature of the sacrificial square and concluded, “At the pinnacle of the Assassin pathway is an evil goddess. No one knows if She might suddenly lose Her sanity. Deities of the same pathway have the ability to influence Bypassers when They consume potions for advancement. This, well, divine manifestation, complicates things.”

“This place can significantly weaken that connection.”

Jenna listened intently and approached the stone pillar engraved with the Sun Sacred Emblem. She extended her arms slightly and began to pray.

Noticing that she hadn't asked Franca why she hadn't been affected by this before, Lumian raised his right hand, stroked his chin, and clicked his tongue.

“Praise the Sun!” Jenna sang praises to the Eternal Blazing Sun reverently as she concluded her prayer.

Lumian remained silent as he handed Jenna the Witch Beyonder characteristic, Shadow Lizard scales, and other ingredients from the black satchel.

He had used her 10,000 verl d'or to obtain these items from Gardner Martin.

Jenna examined the dark-blue vertical eye-like “jewel” and the intricate thread-like patterns on its surface. She knelt on one knee and began concocting the potion on the unusually clean square ground.

Before long, she held a dark-red potion with concealed shadows in her hand.

Jenna steadied herself, feeling as though she had been pushed forward by various events in the past few months. She couldn't stop now.

Perhaps this is my destiny... Praise the Sun! Jenna closed her eyes and added silently in her heart, Praise The Fool!

At this critical moment, in her quest for smooth advancement and survival, her faith inadvertently shifted.

This was partly because Franca and Lumian seemed relatively relaxed about consuming potions and advancing their Sequences. At the very least, they both believed in Mr. Fool.

Without hesitation, Jenna swallowed the potion, fully accepting the notion that she had been dead when she assassinated Hugues Artois.

The potion was icy and illusory, like melting frost. Jenna quickly began to feel an itching, painful sensation spreading all over her body.

Her thoughts began to blur, and she felt as though she were slowly sinking into water.

Suddenly, excruciating pain surged throughout her body, jolting Jenna back to full awareness. She found herself surrounded by black, silent flames that were slowly consuming her.

Above her, a translucent layer of frost-encased ice, like a mirror, prevented Jenna from escaping the black flames.

In the next instant, a face and a figure materialized on the ice.

The face bore an uncanny resemblance to Jenna's own!

The figure was another Jenna, but her master hand had transformed into her left!

The Jenna above the ice stared at the figure engulfed by the black flames with anticipation and desire.

Experienced in combat, Jenna reacted quickly despite her surprise and horror. She summoned all her strength and delivered a powerful punch upward.

The ice shattered without a sound, and the “corrupted” Jenna plunged into the black flames.

In the distance, a python-like black object swayed gently, with a dark-blue vertical eye at its tip.

The bizarre “python” vanished in an instant, not entering the area. Instead, it delved into a black shadow.

Almost simultaneously, Jenna heard a long, painful sigh.

The ethereal sigh seemed to emanate from very close to her, as if it originated from the vicinity of the sacrificial square and the surrounding corpses.

The black shadow cast by the strange serpent expanded wildly, growing larger and fainter.

It enveloped Jenna and the malevolent figure and seeped into their bodies.

Jenna refused to surrender. Enduring the pain and dizziness, she crawled out of the abyss of black flames and onto the nearby ice. The black shadow weakened and ceased its pursuit. It could only drag the malevolent Jenna into an unfathomable abyss.

The scene shattered instantly, and Jenna's vision returned to normal. She saw the mottled stone pillar engraved with the Sun Sacred Emblem.

Her face contorted, but the pain in her body gradually subsided.

Lumian watched as the black flames on Jenna's body rapidly shrank and dissipated, while the surrounding frost melted. He understood that his companion had successfully advanced to Sequence 7 and had become a Witch.

Only then did he turn his gaze towards the edge of the sacrificial square, where the tomb and the surrounding corpses lay in darkness.

Not long after Jenna consumed the potion, he sensed an anomaly in that direction. However, nothing entered the clean square with the two sacrificial pillars.

When Jenna's unusual state finally subsided, she rose to her feet and noticed Lumian gazing into the distance. Puzzled, she asked, "After drinking the potion, I thought I heard a sigh from over there."

Lumian nodded slowly and replied, "On this level of the catacombs, there's a Krismona Night Pillar. It represents a Demoness of Catastrophe who once met her end here."