

## Inevitability 451

Chapter 451 Fate's Prank

Simultaneously, he sighed silently.

Anthony Reid held the quietly burning cigarette in his hand and pondered for a few seconds before saying, "How did Philip die?"

The information he had gathered so far indicated that General Philip had succumbed to a sudden ailment, but that was the public declaration. The actual situation remained unknown.

Annis's tone drifted as she replied, "He had a heart attack in the middle of the night and couldn't make it to the hospital before he died."

Anthony Reid asked calmly, "Where's his body?"

"It was purified, cremated, and sent to the family cemetery in Quartier de l'Erato." What Annis said was public information.

Lumian turned to Anthony Reid.

"Ask her about the fate of his Beyonder characteristics."

He believed that Philip was definitely a Beyonder. After all, he had managed to rise up the ranks to general in the army, and he also came from an aristocratic family—the chances of him not being a Beyonder were slim.

After the Psychiatrist finished his question, Annis said in a daze, "What are Beyonder characteristics?"

Anthony Reid analyzed the mentality and knowledge of the individual and changed his question.

"Where did the thing that emerged from Philip's body go? Or did he have any special items on or around him? Where did it go?"

Annis recalled and said, "When the servant arrived to carry him downstairs to take the carriage, he told me with difficulty that if he died, there was no need to be surprised by any strange changes in his body. I was to stow away the thing that appeared and leave them for the children.

"L-later, too many things happened during the funeral, and I was too sad. That thing disappeared and was never to be found..."

He even felt that the other party's Beyonder characteristics hadn't truly emerged. The phenomenon Annis saw and the thing she had put away were an illusion created by a corresponding ability or ritual, and they naturally vanished in time.

Anthony Reid, who had discussed this matter with Lumian and the others several times, clearly had similar thoughts. His voice was calm as he asked, "What did it look like?"

Annis's Body of Heart and Mind replied in a voice, "It was his fist. It turned skinless, and the joints were like black metal. They were very sharp, and they easily cut through the back of the chair..."

Anthony Reid further inquired and confirmed that Annis didn't have much information. She didn't even know the Sequence of General Philip's original pathway.

Seeing this, Lumian circled the master bedroom, and his gaze landed on a photo frame on the desk.

On it was a photo of Philip's family, but color photography technology that had emerged in recent years wasn't used.

In the family portrait, General Philip wore a high-ranking military officer's suit adorned with numerous medals. He wasn't too tall, and judging from the surrounding items for scale, he stood about 1.7 meters tall.

His hair was thick and slightly curled, and his eyes were small, but they had the sharpness of an eagle staring at its prey. The beard around his mouth was neatly trimmed, and the tip was even coated with paraffin. The bridge of his nose was unique, as if it had been broken and hadn't healed, causing the middle section to bulge.

Lumian observed closely and memorized Philip's exact appearance and characteristics.

If he had truly faked his death to escape his original fate, according to Madam Justice, this likely involved the loss of an old fate and the acquisition of a new one. It wouldn't alter his appearance.

In other words, the current individual was likely a stranger who looked identical to General Philip. Lumian hoped to recognize him at a glance if he encountered him in the future.

“Let's go,” Anthony Reid concluded his Telepathy and said to Lumian in disappointment.

Lumian wasn't disheartened by the setback. He nodded gently and said, “To that charity organization.”

The purpose of the charity organization, known as the Dreamseekers, was to provide assistance to outstanding young men who had come to Trier to pursue their dreams but had temporarily fallen into a predicament. To this end, even the staff employed such young men and provided them with free apartments.

The apartments were located in a house rented by the Dreamseekers. The lower two floors housed workplaces, and the upper two floors housed staff quarters.

Ossa, who controlled the charitable organization, also resided there, indicating that he was genuinely assisting the Dreamseekers and not seizing the opportunity to amass wealth.

After leaving Rue Lviv, Lumian and the others hurried towards Quartier 2, the arts and financial district.

Quartier 2 was very close to Quartier 3, where they were currently located. Before long, they arrived not far from Rue Saint-Varro.

The Dreamseekers was located in Building 11 there.

As soon as they alighted from the carriage and before they could approach the street where their target was, Lumian and Anthony Reid saw crimson flames rising in the dark night.

Fierce flames transformed a building into a colossal torch in the night.

Lumian's eyes narrowed as he had a bad premonition.

After exchanging glances with Anthony Reid, they sprinted towards Rue Saint-Varro.

The crackling flames soared into the air, sealing off the four-story building and scorching it black. No one cried out for help or attempted to leap down from the windows. It was as silent as if everyone had died long ago.

Residents of the street woke up and fled in a hurry, others wanting to help the firefighters or watching the commotion from afar.

Anthony Reid looked at the burning building and sighed. "We're too late..."

Lumian stared intently for a moment before slowly shaking his head.

"No.

"Perhaps fate doesn't want us to gain anything. No matter how early we arrive, we'll see something similar."

With so many evil god-blessed involved in the planning, investigations would inevitably encounter various forms of interference. Some were direct, some indirect, some seemingly normal, some rather bizarre, and some seemingly failing to gain fate's favor.

Lumian paused momentarily before continuing,

"At least this means we're on the right path."

Anthony Reid fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "This indirectly proves General Philip's connection to an evil god's faith. My encounter with my comrades might stem from this..."

As he spoke, his voice trailed off.

Dozens of meters away from the burning building, Lumian's face mirrored the fiery inferno as he gazed ahead, his voice steady.

"Do you still want to pursue this?"

"This situation is getting more perilous with each passing moment. It's far more dangerous than the encounter with gunfire you've experienced before."

"Up to this day, do you still wrestle with the fear from that night, the sounds of sudden gunshots? Do you truly possess the courage and determination to press on?"

Anthony Reid lapsed into silence. The middle-aged man, battle-hardened and weathered, remained contemplative for an extended moment.

Before them loomed a house engulfed in raging crimson flames. Masked firefighters in their red and blue uniforms, citizens in disarray, and chaos swirled around them.

After an uncertain pause, the Psychiatrist, his receding hairline and slightly plump face, spoke softly.

"Perhaps I perished in that attack. What remains is an avenging spirit, relentless in its pursuit of truth and retribution.

“I can be vanquished, but I can't relinquish the pursuit. That's what I felt when you mentioned the existence of leads and hope.”

Lumian offered a sly grin and turned toward Anthony.

“Welcome to the abyss of vengeance.”

Returning to the market district, Lumian wasted no time in composing a letter to Madam Magician, apprising her of the night's operation and its final outcome.

He couldn't shake the feeling that the current situation had stretched beyond the capabilities of his team. Regardless of the clues they unearthed, it seemed as though the threads of destiny conspired to sever them, leaving their investigations seemingly fated to failure.

This uncertainty gave Lumian pause, making him wary of delving deeper into the mystery, fearing that their actions might inadvertently endanger the slim glimmer of the less significant leads on your own. Termiboros resides within you—a heavy stone capable of stirring ripples in the River of Fate. He's not easily swayed, unlike the hope they still clung to.

Before long, the “doll” messenger returned, bearing neatly folded papers.

“All fates intertwine to weave a grand drama.

“Should you come across any future clues, share the vital ones with me. Investigate the less significant leads on your own. Termiboros resides within you—a heavy stone capable of stirring ripples in the River of Fate. He's not easily swayed, unlike the others.

“Furthermore, we shall make other attempts.”

Considering the Tarot Club's potency, Lumian suspected that this case might be met with direct interference from angels or even evil gods.

After reducing the letter to ashes, Lumian reclined on his bed. As he prepared for sleep, he contemplated the direction his investigation should take.

“Linked to the Hostel, individuals engaged in painting, writing, and those with a penchant for reading tend to encounter trouble...”

In the whirlwind of his thoughts, Lumian's mind settled on one person.

Gabriel, the playwright who had once taken up residence at Auberge du Coq Doré.

Gabriel had relocated to Rue Saint-Michel in Quartier 2, a district teeming with painters and authors. It was an ideal hub for artistic exchanges.

Lumian quickly reached a decision. At the break of dawn, he planned to visit Gabriel, inquiring whether the playwright had encountered any obscure authors or painters who had yet to garner recognition, or if any unusual anecdotes had circulated among these artistic circles.

Chapter 452 Manuscript

At noon the following day, Quartier 2, Rue Saint-Michel.

Lumian quickly realized that it was only a short distance from Rue Saint-Varro, where the Dreamseekers charity organization was situated, just a block and a square away.

He glanced away from the Sun Obelisk standing proudly in the square's center and strolled along Rue Saint-Michel, tracing the path that winded past the ancient and weathered buildings.

He couldn't help but notice impoverished painters hunched over their sketchpads at the square's edge and along both sides of the street. Musicians played their diverse tunes with guitars, violins, and flutes. Every so often, white homing pigeons glided gracefully beside a fountain that sent water cascading in sync with the music.

The warm autumn sun cast a poetic charm over the scene.

Having spent a considerable amount of time in the market district, often consumed by thoughts of revenge, engrossed in investigations, or participating in banquets, Lumian had rarely immersed himself in the everyday life of Trier's core area.

Unfazed by the sunlight and the languid ambiance, donning a brown round hat, a light-blue shirt, and a casual brownish-yellow suit, he made his way into a bar named "Third-Rate Authors."

Here, most patrons sported well-worn attire, sipped affordable spirits, and engaged in animated discussions on various subjects. Occasionally, when inspiration struck, they'd retrieve well-thumbed notebooks and jot down their thoughts with the fountain pens they carried.

As Lumian approached the bar counter, he couldn't help but overhear a lively discussion among some of the patrons regarding the latest art exhibition.

"That piece called 'Cafe' is incredibly controversial. Some people laud it for its vibrant colors and audacious composition, seeing it as a silent protest delivered in an absurd form. Others think it's a deliberate attempt at abstract art, a ruse to dupe the public's intellect."

"I find it fascinating. The artist's ideas are vividly depicted through those overlapping colors. Just think about it. Isn't that how many cafés are? Noisy, bustling, with people from diverse backgrounds clashing and mingling like a chaotic blend..."

"I'm willing to call it a groundbreaking masterpiece of abstract art!"

"Are you talking about the kind of abstract art that's never been recognized or sold?"

Lumian couldn't help but think,

Upon reaching the bar counter, Lumian spent eight licks on a glass of absinthe and raised his voice.

"Everyone, I have a question. If anyone can provide the answer, this glass is on me!"

As all eyes in the bar turned towards him, Lumian spoke up:

"I'm looking for the playwright, Gabriel.

"I need him to write a script."

In Rue Saint-Michel, nearly anyone one bumped into on the road could be an author or painter, let alone in a bar known for its literary discussions and artistic creativity.

Gabriel had frequent meetings with fellow writers and may even host private gatherings in his rented apartment. After all, "Lightseeker" had seen successful screenings and was quite popular, which would bring him significant benefits.

"He hasn't shown up for a few days. He claims he's locking himself away to finish a story," a middle-aged man near the bar counter responded to Lumian's inquiry with a smile. "He's probably swamped with scripts. Would you consider other playwrights? There are several equally talented young folks around here."

"How will I know if I don't give it a try? I come with plenty of sincerity."

"Alright," the middle-aged man in the tattered formal coat murmured. "I hope you won't be disappointed."

He led Lumian to 34 Rue Saint-Michel and climbed the stairs up to the fifth floor, near the attic.

The outer walls and stairs had a slightly outdated but still well-maintained appearance, and it was notably cleaner and more spacious compared to Auberge du Coq Doré.

"This is where Gabriel resides," the bearded middle-aged man informed Lumian, rapping on the brown wooden door of Room 503.

A muffled sound echoed, but there was no response.

"Perhaps he's out searching for food, or maybe he's completed his work and gone to see the theater manager who commissioned it," the middle-aged man suggested with a forced smile. "Would you like to return to the bar for another drink? I'm an experienced writer myself, though I've never ventured into script writing. My novels sell quite well in the underground market."

"What have you written?" Lumian asked, glancing at the firmly closed brown door, showing no signs of anxiety.

The middle-aged man sighed and said, "I wrote 'Monk Pursuing Dog' and its sequel, 'Dog Pursuing Monk,' but they weren't published under my name. For one, it would lead to my arrest by spies, and secondly, my boss wouldn't permit it."

"A sequel?" Lumian hadn't visited an underground book market or a banned bookstore for some time. His last visit had been to purchase "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles."

As he looked at the somewhat forlorn and slightly greasy middle-aged man, his perspective shifted.

He could be considered one of his initiates into the adult world!

“It came out last month,” the middle-aged man replied, nodding gently. “These two novels have made my boss a fortune, but I didn't even get a tenth of that, no, not even a hundredth!”

“Boss?” Lumian inquired, recalling that Bard, a key member of April Fool's, had once authored “Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles.” He saw this as an opportunity to gain insight into the workings of this profession and prepare for future tracking.

The middle-aged man sighed again.

“We don't have authorship rights, just writing tools for the boss. He pays us a fixed but tiny salary for our manuscripts, specifies the direction and requirements for our writing, and then sells them through his own channels.

“On Rue Saint-Michel, there are many third-rate authors like me who don't even have pen names. We're like assembly line workers.”

Lumian, showing respect, asked, “May I know your name?”

The middle-aged man replied, “Rabe.” His eyes were filled with hope as he gazed at Lumian.

Lumian probed further into the world of underground literature, gaining insight, and ultimately said, “If my attempt to reach an agreement with Gabriel falls through, I'll consider offering you an opportunity.”

Rabe's joy was palpable as he responded, “As long as the boss doesn't assign me any new missions, you'll find me here at Third-Rate Authors every day!”

Watching the underground author, an initiate for many Intis youths, descend the stairs, Lumian took a wire from his pocket and unlocked Gabriel's door.

Compared to the playwright's room at Auberge du Coq Doré, this space was considerably more expansive, encompassing a bathroom and a small bedroom. Beyond that, it served as a living area, study, dining room, and kitchen. A coal stove for cooking was neatly arranged in a corner.

Lumian quickly surveyed the room and noticed a jumbled stack of papers that resembled manuscripts on the desk by the window.

He shut the wooden door behind him and proceeded towards the desk.

Moving into the bedroom, he spotted a pair of black dungarees casually draped over the bed. The sight confirmed his earlier suspicion—he was in the right place.

This was a pair of pants Gabriel had frequently worn in the past.

However, the playwright himself was conspicuously absent.

Recalling Rabe's statement that Gabriel hadn't been seen for several days, Lumian's caution escalated.

He meticulously examined every item in the room, much like a hunter tracking the movements of his prey.

After a few minutes, Lumian picked up a white-glazed porcelain cup with a single handle from the desk. He noticed that about a third of it still held cold water, with dust floating on the surface, too subtle for ordinary eyes to discern clearly.

Setting the porcelain cup down beside the manuscript, Lumian meticulously combed the room, searching for any clues or signs of interest. His search yielded nothing of note.

Returning to the desk, he picked up the stack of manuscripts, eager to delve into Gabriel's work before his unexplained absence.

The script told the tale of a struggling author who crossed paths with a woman coerced into joining a criminal organization. Together, they found solace in their shared despair, pain, torment, and the harshness of daily life. They offered each other encouragement and warmth, ultimately leading to the author's recognition by the newspaper's editor-in-chief and a steady income. His reputation steadily grew, while the woman, still trapped in her circumstances, chose to vanish.

Before the story could conclude, it ended with a passage about the lover's disappearance and the author's introspective musings:

“She's here;

“My beloved has arrived from the night.

“She's left;

“My beloved walked towards the distant hostel...”

The mention of the word “hostel” made Lumian's forehead twitch.

Though it was an ordinary word in a script, it stood out to him due to his daily contemplations and associations, sparking connections in his mind.

His gaze suddenly shifted from the manuscript to the desk.

At some point, the white-glazed porcelain cup with a single handle, which he had moved to the manuscript, had somehow returned to its original place!

Lumian's eyes narrowed, and the muscles under his clothing tensed.

As a Hunter, he had an unwavering memory for any alterations he made in his surroundings—it was a fundamental part of him!

Suddenly, he reached into his pocket and retrieved a pair of glasses.

They were brown gold-rimmed glasses—Mystery Prying Glasses!

#### Chapter 453 Missing Author

Lumian carefully positioned the Mystery Prying Glasses on the bridge of his nose, and immediately, the room seemed to whirl, and the ground beneath him trembled.

Suppressing his nausea and dizziness, he observed the scene before him fragment and overlap, creating a surreal and captivating tableau.



The bed pressed against the desk, which seemed to lean against the ceiling. Behind the ceiling appeared to be a tap, as if it were installed within a wardrobe. These scenes were like translucent canvases superimposed on each other, reflecting themselves in Lumian's vision.

A pale-white face materialized beside the wardrobe.

The face had disheveled brown hair, naturally parted. Dark-brown eyes glistened beneath black-framed glasses. It was Gabriel, looking cleaned up and as though he hadn't burned the midnight oil in a while.

The playwright gazed at Lumian with a vacant, distorted, yet strangely genuine smile.

His right hand reached out from the void, waving gently before his face shrank into the depths of the translucent layers, vanishing completely.

Lumian quickly surveyed the room, but Gabriel hadn't reappeared. He promptly removed the Mystery Prying Glasses, replacing them with the Eye of Truth on his left side.

This mystical item, composed of pale-white flesh and dark blood vessels, covered the corresponding ear, allowing Lumian to hear rapid voices from the distant horizon. The intertwined purple blood vessels formed a lens that adhered to his eye, revealing faint blood, layers of colors, and the room with a third of it blending into the surroundings. An invisible curtain resembling mullioned glass was also discernible.

The latter two phenomena rapidly dissipated or gradually returned to normal.

Before the whispers could become more distinct, Lumian removed the Eye of Truth and massaged his throbbing forehead.

Based on the combined information from both mystical items, he deduced that Gabriel had been corrupted by Hostel, becoming a presence that couldn't be perceived or touched in the conventional sense.

However, the playwright retained a certain degree of rationality. He recognized Lumian and even happily bid him farewell.

Returning the white porcelain cup with a single handle to its original position seemed to serve as a greeting, an attempt to capture Lumian's attention.

Lumian frowned slightly.

His gaze shifted to the manuscript on the desk. The story in the unfinished script felt eerily familiar.

Lumian picked up the manuscript and read it meticulously, at a slower pace than before.

After perusing the first section, he confirmed that the protagonist of the script was Gabriel himself. The character's personality, the details of his life, the cold treatment he endured, and the demand to produce vulgar works all aligned seamlessly.

Regarding the female lead, who immersed herself in the underworld and persistently encouraged the male lead's creations, Lumian couldn't help but feel that if it weren't for the difference in gender, he could be the one with such a background.

However, the female lead's personality, her way of speaking, and her encouraging words were entirely distinct from his own. Even in the scenes involving the mobs, Lumian could discern traces of Charlie.

This woman had once accompanied a painter to a small seaside town as a model. After an extended absence, she returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Painter!

Could Gabriel have been corrupted on that night when Séraphine returned? Was it possible that Séraphine had moved to the Hostel? Lumian meticulously perused the script, leaving no word unread.

Since this was a story born from Gabriel's own experiences, it undoubtedly contained numerous factual details and genuine emotions—invaluable clues!

As Lumian continued to read the script, bathed in the sunlight filtering through the oriel window, he sensed the concealed love that resided within Gabriel's heart. He could feel the ache of remorse, reluctance, and the yearning for a relationship that Gabriel believed he could easily discard when he moved to a better neighborhood to start anew. In the end, he found himself unable to forget it.

The protagonist, increasingly aware of his heart's true desires and feelings, ceased to evade them and actively embarked on a quest to uncover traces of his beloved.

He sought out people who were acquainted with her, visited motels and hotels that occasionally haunted his dreams, and explored galleries in search of new artworks based on his lover...

Yet, his endeavors proved futile, leading him to compose the inner monologue.

Regrettably, the contents of the drawer only covered the first half of the script. By the time Gabriel had reached the second half, he appeared to have delved deeply into his emotions and penned his inner monologue in a single burst.

Lumian looked at the papers before him, pondering the situation.

Lumian made a preliminary guess and conducted a thorough search of Gabriel's rented apartment with a clear objective in mind.

Nothing.

He then left 34 Rue Saint-Michel and made his way back to the Third-Rate Author bar, where he seated himself next to Rabe, who was engrossed in his drink.

"A glass of La Fée Verte," Lumian ordered as he tapped the bar counter.

Then, he turned to Rabe and inquired, "Do you have any idea where Gabriel has been over the past few days?"

Rabe pointed to a small round table near the window and replied, "You'll have to ask them."

As an underprivileged author working as a ghostwriter without a pen name, Rabe considered himself fortunate to know a rising star like Gabriel and attend his private gatherings. He had to

work regularly every day to fulfill the missions assigned by his boss, preventing him from participating in their activities.

Guided by Rabe, Lumian approached the small round table and was taken aback upon seeing the four individuals seated there.

In response to Lumian's inquiry, the leader of the group responded with a puzzled expression, "We last saw Gabriel two days ago. We all went to the Trier Art Center together to attend an art exhibition."

Trocadéro Town.

Franca, dressed in a white jacket, followed Browns Sauron, who wore a black coat, as they navigated through the manor adorned with grapevines.

With curiosity evident on her face, Franca, who had been invited, couldn't help but ask, "Where are you taking me?"

Browns cast a brief glance in her direction.

"I'm taking you to meet my teacher. You've successfully passed the assessment and are now an official member of our sect."

The term "perks" was coined by Emperor Roselle and had gained recognition in Intis.

Browns maintained a bit of distance from Franca as she questioned, "What would you like in exchange?"

Without hesitation, Franca responded, "The potion formula for Affliction."

Affliction was the name of the Assassin pathway's Sequence 5, often referred to as the Demoness of Affliction.

Browns let out a scoff.

"Quite bold to make such a request. Do you believe you have accrued enough contribution points to ask for the potion formula for Affliction?"

She paused for a moment before adding, "Of course, if you can assist the sect in achieving something, this can be your perk."

Franca, who had initially held limited hope and was merely testing the waters, glanced at Browns.

"And what's that something?"

Seizing the opportunity, Browns explained, "We've received information that the Iron and Blood Cross Order discreetly smuggled an item into Trier through an underground tunnel several months ago. If you can uncover what it is and identify its possessor, you'll be entitled to the Affliction potion formula."

In an effort to aid the Savoie Mob's smuggling leader in recovering his brother and the transported goods, she and Lumian had been drawn into a strange mirror world, where they narrowly escaped.

During their adventure, Franca had acquired a classic sterling silver mirror.

## Chapter 454 Hidden Honorific Name

Franca had long harbored the desire to uncover the nature of the item that Gardner Martin had smuggled into Trier through "Rat" Christo. However, in the months that had passed, Gardner Martin had acted as if the incident had never occurred, and nothing of note had appeared around him.

She explained to Browns Sauron in the same manner they had explained the situation to "Rat" Christo in the past. In essence, she shared everything except the fact that she and Lumian had been drawn into a mirror world. Instead, they relied on Lumian's unique ability to escape and how she obtained a classic silver mirror that led them to the mirror world.

"According to the 'Rat,' his brother and many of his subordinates turned into monsters, including the reversal of their left and right hands. This attracted the Purifiers' attention were eliminated." Franca deliberately elaborated, probing Browns Sauron gauge her reaction to the appearance of the mirror people.

Browns displayed a slight furrow of her brow.

"How did the official Beyonders become aware that something was amiss?"

"For that question, you'd need to approach a Purifier, not me."

Without further discussion, Browns led Franca to a circular pavilion enclosed by grapevines and various vines.

Seated in the circular pavilion was a woman donned in a black court dress. Her bright dark gray eyes held a touch of sadness, and her neatly tied black hair featured a few loose strands, which cascaded naturally and added a hint of allure to her otherwise composed countenance.

Upon catching sight of the woman's slightly curved red lips, graceful jawline, and soft facial features, Franca was initially struck by the overwhelming beauty that met her gaze. However, her astonishment was quickly overshadowed by an unexplainable sense of sympathy.

Although she was taken aback and touched by a sense of heartache, it took nearly ten seconds for Franca to remember encountering this woman before.

She had seen her during her and Lumian's surveillance of the fake Theresa, Beatrice Incourt, at the concert. As the most beautiful woman in attendance, she had been invited on stage to take a photograph with the orchestra as a keepsake.

What she hadn't expected was that this woman had openly followed them and even participated in a photograph on stage.

Browns Sauron introduced her teacher, saying, "This is my teacher, Demoness of Black Clarice."

Franca avoided complimenting the woman's appearance. She understood that most Demonesses in the Demoness Sect took pride in their beauty while simultaneously harboring inner conflict regarding it. Compliments from outsiders were typically accepted with grace, potentially leading to some embarrassment. However, if Franca, who knew their true gender, were to offer such compliments, it might be perceived as provocation or mockery.

Demoness of Black Clarice nodded slightly and said, "Every member needs to believe in the Primordial One. You should have known about this more than a month ago. It's time to officially pray to Her."

Franca was not surprised at all. Secret organizations that worshiped evil deities typically required new members to open themselves to their deity, thus gaining a measure of control and filtering out most insecurities.

Lately, when visiting Browns, Franca had followed Madam Judgment's instructions, conducting a preliminary ritual that sought the protection of an angel from Mr. Fool.

"We are all the children of the Primordial One," Franca responded devoutly and respectfully, adhering to Browns's guidance during this period.

Clarice's expression grew solemn, and her eyes were filled with admiration.

"Recite the honorific name of the Primordial One with me in Hermes.

"The source of all catastrophes, the symbol of destruction and the apocalypse, the Demoness who controls Chaos..."

Although the Demoness of Black spoke in Intisian, the surroundings darkened significantly. The grapevines writhed gently, as though transforming into venomous snakes.

Franca remained composed and repeated the three-lined honorific name in Hermes.

Suddenly, she saw grapevines extending towards her.

They grew thicker and thicker, completely enveloping the circular pavilion.

One of the python-like vines extended toward Franca, and a dark-blue vertical eye opened at its tip. It reflected Franca's figure.

The figure rapidly distorted, transforming into a man with a bloodied face.

The man had short flaxen-colored hair, slightly thick brown eyebrows, and lake-blue eyes. His lips were thin, and his appearance was ordinary.

Franca was taken aback. This face was familiar to her.

It was the face she saw in the mirror every day before consuming the Witch potion.

This was her past self, Franco Roland!

In the deep-blue vertical eye, Franco Roland's expression turned ferocious. His eyes held a tangible hatred, and his face was filled with a viciousness that could cause nightmares.

Franca's body stiffened, as if she had turned into a statue made of rock.

After staring at her for a few seconds, the vine with the blue vertical eye retracted into the canopy of grapevines, its eyes reflecting its unhappiness.

Franca finally felt her body. She blinked and saw that everything around the circular pavilion was normal. Sunlight pierced through the gaps between the vines and shone here.

There were no python-like vines, nor were there any blue vertical eyes. It was as if the bizarre and nightmarish encounter had never happened. All of it appeared to be a fleeting, surreal vision.

She lowered her head and completed her prayer.

As Franca continued her rituals, she couldn't shake the eerie experience from her mind. The connection between the Primordial Demoness and the underground mirror world was undeniable.

She had encountered her past self, Franco Roland, in the mirror world as well.

This time, it wasn't Franca reflected in the blue vertical eye either. It was Franca's former appearance—Franco Roland!

Clarice, with a black veiled hat on her head, nodded.

“Now, you're a child of the Primordial One.”

“Thank you for your guidance.” Franca smiled and inquired, “I thought the honorific name for the Primordial One would include a description akin to the Ruler of the Mirror World. I'm surprised it's not part of it?”

The Demoness of Black, Clarice, replied in a cold, indifferent, yet pitiful tone, “This isn't the complete honorific name of the Primordial One. There are two more lines you can't know right now.”

Clarice continued, “Every new member receives a Primordial One statue. It possesses anti-divination and early warning abilities, and it can assist you in performing rituals. You must pray to it every day.”

While speaking, she produced a bone statue, the palm-sized statue vaguely resembling a beautiful woman with hair that reached her ankles. Each strand of hair was intricately carved with distinct, snake-like eyes, some open and others tightly shut, densely packed and unsettling.

After Franca stowed away the Primordial Demoness statue, Clarice's brow furrowed imperceptibly.

“Keep a close watch on the Iron and Blood Cross Order, especially Gardner Martin. If they make any unusual moves, contact Browns immediately. If the situation becomes critical, retrieve the Primordial One statue, set up the altar, and perform the designated ritual. After completion, place the prepared letter into the mirror on the altar.”

She sensed an impending catastrophe and couldn't help but grow anxious.

In Quartier 2, outside the Trier Arts Center, Lumian stood on the steps, contemplating the authors' responses that flashed through his mind.

“Gabriel has been enjoying art exhibitions and galleries for the past month or so.”

“He doesn't pay much attention to each painting. It's as if he's searching for the one his soul has been waiting for.”

“There's nothing unusual about him.”

“He didn't fixate on any other visitors at the exhibition.”

“...”

The information revealed by these answers left Lumian puzzled about his next steps. Nonetheless, he had decided to visit the Trier Art Center to explore the art exhibition titled “Future Impressions.”

It was scheduled to end in another two days.

Before arriving, Lumian had secured a hotel and a room for setting up a ritual. He summoned a messenger and informed Madam Magician about Gabriel's encounter and the direction of his investigation.

Initially, he had planned to relay the message from the bar's washroom, but he recalled that the “doll” messenger had severe mysophobia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Consequently, he opted to spend a bit of money to find a clean and suitable place.

As he gazed at the colorful art center with its sun-like roof, Lumian took a slow breath and presented his ticket to enter the building.

“Future Impressions” wasn't a large art exhibition, occupying only three exhibition halls. Lumian strolled through, admiring the artworks displayed on the walls.

Suddenly, he spotted a familiar figure.

#### Chapter 455 Two Children

The figure he saw was a boy of about seven or eight, dressed like a young gentleman with yellow hair, brown eyes, and chubby cheeks. He had an honest and innocent aura, and Lumian immediately recognized him as Baron Brignais's godson, the peculiar boy, Ludwig.

Ludwig stood in front of a wall painting adorned with doughnuts, his young eyes fixated on the artwork. Sensing someone watching him, he turned around and spotted Lumian.

Lumian smiled and playfully teased, “Running away from home again?”

Ludwig, this time with more composure, replied, “No. I told my godfather that learning can't be limited to textbook knowledge. It's equally important to read more, hear more, and interact with other things.”

Lumian inquired, “And he brought you here to see the art exhibition?” However, he couldn't spot Baron Brignais in the vicinity.

He noticed that Ludwig's intelligence and knowledge seemed to have improved a bit, allowing him to come up with an excuse he had used before.

It appeared that learning was having a positive impact on him!

Ludwig nodded and added, “Yes. It's important for a child to cultivate an appreciation for art from a young age.”

Lumian clicked his tongue and continued, “So, no textbooks, homework, or exams today?”

Ludwig responded, a joyful smile unknowingly plastered across his face, “It's incidental.”

Internally, Lumian noted,

At that moment, Baron Brignais, donning a silk top hat and a black suit, approached from the other side of the exhibition hall.

Lumian couldn't help but make a mocking remark, "Aren't you worried he'll get lost?"

As a Conspirer, Lumian picked up on something unusual about this situation.

Given Brignais's past anxiety when Ludwig ran away, he shouldn't have left the child alone in the exhibition hall!

Brignais smiled and said, "Ludwig has been doing well recently and hasn't tried to run away from home. He was engrossed in admiring the paintings, so I didn't want to disrupt him when I went to the washroom."

He sensed that Baron Brignais had an ulterior motive for arranging this visit to the exhibition. It was akin to leading an experienced hound to a specific occasion, releasing its ropes to see if it would track down certain prey.

After answering Lumian's question, Baron Brignais, clutching his bulging briefcase, looked at Ludwig.

"When you get back, write an essay regarding the art exhibition, detailing your feelings and the work that left the deepest impression."

Ludwig's expression crumbled.

Lumian was not surprised. He had plenty of experience being thrown into such a situation.

Instead of conversing with Baron Brignais and Ludwig, he chose to continue his observation of the paintings. His attention fixated on the presence of any motel-like structures within the corresponding pieces, the existence of a human model resembling Séraphine, and the potential impact on the visitors' perceptions and their surroundings.

Regrettably, Lumian's exploration of the three small exhibition halls yielded no significant findings. Instead, Mullen's "Café" drawing, which he had created with his buttocks, drew the attention of numerous tourists, sparking both admiration and criticism.

Standing in the final exhibition hall, Lumian contemplated his next move. Retrieving his brown, gold-rimmed glasses, he decided to give them a try.

Since his unaided vision and Spirit Vision revealed no discernible issues, he opted to test the Mystery Prying Glasses from the same pathway!

Carefully positioning the glasses on his nose bridge, Lumian braced himself as the world around him seemed to spin and whirl. His focus remained on the scenes unfolding within his "vision."

Each painting took on a life of its own, breaking free from the confines of the walls.

Some of the paintings seemed to regard Lumian with a chilling, penetrating gaze.

Initially taken aback, Lumian feared that something extraordinary was afoot with all the portraits, potentially placing him in a dire situation. However, he soon realized that he wasn't under attack.

The figures within the portraits merely stared at him with silent and cold intensity.



It was as if they had attained a degree of consciousness and a sense of being, yet they hadn't fully emerged from their canvas confines to walk among the living.

A revelation dawned upon Lumian.

Through the lens of the Mystery Prying Glasses, he was witnessing another reality.

Perhaps, in some parallel aspect of the world, each painting held a semblance of reality. However, they remained two-dimensional, flat, and lacking in depth, incapable of significantly impacting the human realm or the spirit world. There might be exceptions, moments where extended contemplation of certain works induced feelings of delirium or anxiety.

It occurred to Lumian that Painters could potentially amplify the limited, flat nature of these objects, opening a pathway to the realm of the real.

In essence, the characters within ordinary paintings might possess an incomplete, condensed, and spiritually deficient existence in this two-dimensional, flat world. With the aid of the Mystery Prying Glasses, they were unveiled in their true form.

Likewise, Lumian's perception unveiled deeper truths—the artist's most profound creative intentions.

One painting depicted the future of Trier, a divided realm. On the surface, men and women reveled in lavish banquets, adorned in opulent attire. Beneath the surface, ragged individuals dwelled in dark tunnels, subsisting on earthworms, rats, and moss. Yet, through the Mystery Prying Glasses, Lumian glimpsed fat, glutinous pigs with oil oozing from their mouths on the surface. Below, grotesque, contorted visages and decaying hands reached upwards.

This was the true message the artist sought to convey.

In the next instant, Lumian spotted Baron Brignais and his godson Ludwig.

The former appeared unremarkable when viewed through the Mystery Prying Glasses, but there was a faint, brassy aura emanating from his form. As for the latter, something chilling unfolded as he abruptly turned his head, seemingly locking eyes with Lumian across two exhibition halls.

Ludwig's chubby face took on an unsettling transformation; his skin seemed to writhe, as if it were on the verge of shedding, and something from beneath the surface attempted to burrow out.

Lumian's heart tightened, and he instinctively removed the Mystery Prying Glasses, instantly restoring the scene to its normal state.

He had always sensed that Ludwig was far from ordinary, but this encounter had sent his danger instincts into overdrive.

The true nature of the innocent-seeming human skin concealing the boy beneath remained an ominous mystery.

Even a Conspirer's constitution couldn't withstand this.

Taking a deep breath, Lumian made his way to the washroom adjacent to the three exhibition halls.

It was situated at the end of a long corridor adorned with statues and paintings, perfectly in line with the Trier Arts Center's ambiance.

Once inside the washroom, Lumian attended to his urgent needs, and after washing his face with cold water, he gradually regained his composure, with the discomfort dissipating.

Exiting the washroom, Lumian's gaze naturally drifted toward the opposite wall, where a series of paintings were on display.

One particular painting drew his attention, a macabre and enigmatic piece that gripped his senses.

It was an oil painting set against a vividly layered background, with a focal point on a naked woman.

Her face remained blurred, as if the painter had intentionally left it blank. On her body, distinct faces emerged, each bearing a different emotion—anger, hatred, malice, joy. Some of these faces resembled those of cats, others of dogs, and some appeared to exist solely in the realm of fantasy. What united them was their eerie, translucent yet lifelike quality.

As Lumian stared at this unsettling painting, a thought dawned on him.

During Gabriel's visit to the art exhibition, he had seemed perfectly normal, at least as per the accounts of the authors. But they couldn't have monitored his every move, especially during mundane activities like visiting the washroom!

Avenue du Marché, Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Jenna had just stepped out when she spotted a familiar figure standing beneath a gas street lamp on the opposite side of the road.

It was a young boy, dressed in a white shirt, silver vest, black coat, and a mercury bow tie, his light-yellow hair neatly combed.

With a slight bow, she greeted him with a smile, “Were you waiting for me?”

The boy glanced at her and muttered, “I wasn't waiting for you. You were waiting for me. You met me earlier than any other choice.”

The boy's response was measured and earnest, “That day was that day, and today is today. Just because it was a little dangerous that day doesn't mean it's dangerous today.”

“Alright...” Jenna probed with a probing smile. “Do you need my help to buy you an ice-cream?”

The boy, however, responded with a long, almost adult-like sigh.

“It's something else; I'll pay you.”

The boy reached into his pocket and retrieved a gleaming golden coin, sidestepping her question.

“This will be your reward—a lucky gold coin.”

#### Chapter 456 The Charlatan's Instructions

Perplexed, she inquired, “This isn't verl d'or?”

The boy chuckled and explained, “This is a gold pound, more valuable than Louis d'or.”

“You're not from Intis?” Jenna was taken aback, but she didn't think there was a problem.

The boy's appearance did differ somewhat from the locals.

“I'm Loenese,” the boy with neatly combed, light-yellow hair replied honestly.

Jenna chose not to dig deeper, understanding that whether the coin was a gold pound or Louis d'or didn't affect its practical worth.

Based on their previous encounter, she trusted the boy's ability to bring good luck.

She looked at him, awaiting his next words.

The boy returned the lucky gold coin to his pocket, showing no intention of prepayment.

Instead, he pointed at the ground and said, “At ten tonight, enter Underground Trier from the entrance here. Proceed as far as you can, following any available path, until you reach an underground river.

“Find a hiding spot nearby and wait for the first person to pass by. Take all their belongings.”

“Before completing this matter, you can't tell anyone what you want to do or where you plan to go.”

Go underground purely based on intuition and rely on luck to find prey? Jenna found the boy's instructions rather reminiscent of Ciel's “charlatan temperament.”

As for how to acquire the person's belongings, there seemed to be only one solution: through combat; she was to subdue the other party!

Jenna knew the boy was likely a formidable Beyonder aligned with her cause, and without hesitation, she agreed, “Got it.”

The boy smiled.

“When you obtain those items and hand them over to me, I'll pay you the lucky gold coin as a reward.”

“How should I address you? And where should I find you when the time comes?” Jenna, aware that he wasn't an ordinary boy, couldn't help but speak in a respectful tone.

The boy mumbled, “You can call me Will. Talking to me like that makes me sound like an adult. I'm just in elementary school!

“When the time comes, you'll naturally encounter me.”

Is he one of those born Beyonders mentioned at the mysticism gatherings? He's indeed young, but his abilities are outstanding? Jenna made a connection and followed his instructions. She replied with a smile, “Alright, Will.”

Will waved her off and said, “You may leave.”

But I'm planning to have lunch at the café diagonally behind you... Jenna muttered and changed direction to head back to Rue des Blouses Blanches for food.

However, after walking for more than ten meters, her curiosity got the best of her, and she turned to glance at the iron-black gas street lamp pole.

The strange boy, Will, had vanished from his spot.

Jenna took a closer look and realized that he had entered the nearby café and was now seated at a booth by the window, where an attendant had just brought him a cup with three scoops of ice cream.

He's truly just a child... Jenna mused, her curiosity satisfied as she continued on her way.

In the financial district, within the Trier Arts Center,

Lumian took out the brown Mystery Prying Glasses once again after having surmised something.

With no hesitation or fear, he donned the mystical item.

The exhibition hall had been his main focus, with the washroom separated by a long corridor.

Amidst the familiar dizziness, the oil painting in front of Lumian underwent a peculiar transformation.

The faces adorning the naked woman's body turned to look at him.

Simultaneously, Lumian sensed the presence of a creature on the rooftop, where the overlapping sky was, staring at him from a distance. It appeared to be trying to navigate the obstacles and approach him rapidly.

As the blurry face of the woman in the oil painting gradually clarified, her true identity became apparent: brown eyes darting, brown hair cascading, a plump, smooth-skinned face, and an air of detachment...

Lumian recognized her. She was none other than Miss Séraphine, the former tenant of Auberge du Coq Doré, the human model, and the lover playwright Gabriel had been searching for!

As Séraphine's face became clearer, Lumian's surroundings darkened, as if faces were on the verge of emerging from the painting or the void.

Quickly, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses from his nose bridge, and all the anomalies vanished in an instant, leaving only the sensation of raised hair on his skin.

As expected, the human model for this oil painting is Séraphine...

Although Gabriel is an ordinary person and doesn't possess the Mystery Prying Glasses, he once slept with Séraphine and knows her physical characteristics. That must have been how he noticed traces of his lover when he entered and exited the washroom...

Could it be that Séraphine possesses multiple faces on her body, appearing both painted and alive, just like this oil painting?

Wasn't Gabriel afraid back then?

After discovering the oil painting with Séraphine as the model here, he encountered that normally difficult-to-see creature when he returned?

The timing matches up—the water glass on his desk was more than a day old, and he visited the art exhibition two days ago... Something must have transpired late at night.

After being attacked and possibly corrupted, why did he remain in the apartment until my visit?

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he turned his attention to the oil painting's signature—Claude Pierre August.

The painter was not widely recognized; otherwise, his artwork would not have been hung along the corridor to the washroom. Furthermore, his work was perhaps added for the “Future Impressions” exhibition.

Likewise, he believed that since something had happened to Gabriel, Pierre might have gone missing. He had even gone to the “Hostel” when Séraphine moved out of Auberge du Coq Doré.

Regardless, I should inform Madam Magician. What if there are any clues left behind? Otherwise, they wouldn't have dealt with an ordinary person like Gabriel. Lumian had no intention of pursuing Claude Pierre August himself. This was because it would take a lot of time to gather information about the other party through various channels. And with the target's name and identity, an astromancy master like Madam Magician should be able to quickly lock onto the painter's residence.

In addition, Gabriel had been attacked late at night after learning about Claude, the painter. Lumian's current information was only a fraction of his own.

Lumian gazed at the oil painting, his lips curling into a smile.

Will I be attacked?

I'm looking forward to it.

Around 9 p.m., at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601, Franca, recalling the Demoness Sect's mission, suspected the Iron and Blood Cross Order would soon make a significant move, and her plan was to visit Gardner Martin while digesting the Pleasure potion along the way.

Rather than her usual method of knocking on the door and entering, Franca decided to take a more covert approach.

She intended to hide around 11 Rue des Fontaines, in the garden, or on the lawn, observing discreetly before finding Gardner Martin.

Recognizing Gardner's Sequence and abilities, she returned to her bedroom and retrieved a palm-sized Primordial Demoness statue, which she concealed in a pocket.

This would enhance her ability to remain hidden and reduce the chances of Beyonder powers detecting her.

“I'm heading to Gardner's.” Franca waved at Jenna, opened the door, and left Apartment 601.

Jenna acknowledged and breathed a sigh of relief.

She was about to leave and was a little nervous.

Franca arrived at Rue des Fontaines via a rental carriage but chose not to have the driver stop at Building 11 as usual. Instead, she disembarked from a distance and swiftly disappeared into the shadows, stealthily making her way to Gardner Martin's residence.

Her familiarity with the surroundings allowed her to find a gap in the guards' patrol, and she nimbly scaled a side wall to silently descend into the garden.

Franca didn't attempt to infiltrate the building directly. Instead, she followed the shadows, circling to the edge of the front lawn. Next to a gas street lamp, she observed the grayish-white three-story villa, still illuminated.

As time passed, Franca remained vigilant, focused on observing the figures appearing at the windows and their activities.

Suddenly, the main door of the villa swung open, and butler Faustino emerged, accompanied by a figure cloaked in black.

The black-cloaked individual was of average height, standing at around 1.75 meters. Their entire form was concealed, making it impossible to discern their appearance or physical attributes.

Who could it be? Gardner Martin's partner, or a key member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order in charge of other regions? Franca wondered.

As the black-cloaked figure exited the iron fence while butler Faustino retreated into the villa, Franca hesitated for only a moment before making a decision.

She realized that unless she ventured inside Gardner Martin's residence thoroughly, she wouldn't obtain valuable information. Her earlier exploration had been open and yielded little. The cloaked individual might provide her with fresh leads leading to unexpected gains.

Franca, who was invisible, touched the Primordial Demoness statue in her hidden pocket and grew confident.

She circled around the lawn's edge and scaled the iron fence, stealthily trailing the mysterious figure in the black cloak.

At 10 p.m., Jenna embarked on her journey into Underground Trier, an entrance not far from Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lacking a carbide lamp, she relied on her Assassin's night vision to navigate in the pitch-black environment. Jenna was determined to commit the path to memory and proceeded deeper into the underground tunnels, trusting her instincts.

As she advanced, the silence around her grew ever more profound.

Jenna exhaled slowly, alleviating the tension and fear in her heart.

Jenna deliberately moved away from the tunnel's center, pressed herself against a rock wall, and continued cautiously.

After an indeterminate amount of time, the sound of running water reached her ears.

She proceeded for another seven to eight meters around a rocky outcrop, where a small river flowed slowly in the dark underground.

Jenna steadied herself, spotting a mottled stone pillar to hide behind, her form merging with the dense shadows.

She refrained from using Invisibility, recognizing her limitations as a Witch—the duration she could maintain her powers was limited, and she had no way of knowing how long it would take for the target to arrive.

In the silent underground, time seemed to stretch, and Jenna's mental stress steadily built up.

At last, the reverberation of footsteps reached her ears.

## Chapter 457 Unexpected Target

After briefing Madam Magician on the situation, Lumian left and went to the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

His next objective was to ascertain whether the enigmatic entity that had targeted him from afar, attempting to approach rapidly while he observed Séraphine's oil painting with the Mystery Prying Glasses, would pay him a visit during the night, much like how it had dealt with Gabriel.

He lay on the bed, closed his eyes, and gradually drifted off to sleep.

Lumian had full confidence in Madam Magician. As a Major Arcana card holder in the Tarot Club, she appeared to possess the ability to launch long-range attacks and was skilled at dealing with untouchable and enigmatic creatures.

As his thoughts blurred and he succumbed to slumber, Lumian found himself in a hazy dream, returning to Auberge du Coq Doré. Dim light filtered through the glass windows on each floor of the slightly tilted building. Gabriel, attired in a white shirt, dark jacket, black pants, and strapless leather shoes, sat on the entrance steps.

The playwright's visage was somewhat translucent, and an air of detachment lingered in his eyes.

Upon spotting Lumian, Gabriel stood up abruptly, a conspicuous smile crossing his face.

Lumian halted warily and looked at him.

“What are you doing here?”

Gabriel's smile waned as he spoke urgently,

“Leave Trier immediately! This place is about to become extremely dangerous!”

Lumian frowned and inquired, “What have you discovered?”

Gabriel cast a wary gaze around before responding, “I'm not entirely sure what they're planning, but I do know it will bring destruction to all of Trier.”

They... Lumian pressed for more information. “Are you staying at the Hostel? Where is it?”

A hint of confusion appeared on Gabriel's face.

“You need to be like me to enter or gain the approval of the pixies.

“I didn't know how to find it. I found myself at the door as soon as I arrived.”

As expected, the Hostel is closely related to the Pixies... Did Gabriel rely on the corruption to alter his existence and reach the Hostel like teleportation? Lumian's thoughts raced as he asked in a deep voice, "Why did you choose to go to the Hostel? Were you coerced into it?"

"No," Gabriel shook his head, his voice softening. "I did it of my own accord. Séraphine came to fetch me personally, and I couldn't refuse. It's what I wanted."

A touch of happiness crossed his face.

It was Séraphine who corrupted Gabriel and led him to the Hostel... Lumian suddenly felt a pang of sorrow.

"Have you realized that you've become a monster?"

Gabriel fell silent for a few seconds before responding, "I know, but I won't harm anyone!"

He paused a beat before continuing, "My script has already achieved success. I have the reputation and income I desired most. I have no regrets in that regard. All I want now is to be with Séraphine, whether she's human or a monster."

Lumian didn't scold or berate him. Instead, he looked at Gabriel and let out a long sigh. "I understand your feelings and thoughts."

Gabriel's face showed gratitude, and he spoke sincerely, "After becoming a monster, I seem to have the ability to see a certain future. That's why I knew you would come to me. I asked Séraphine to let me stay in the room for two more days to bid you farewell. She agreed. She's not a pure monster!"

Lumian's heart stirred, and he spoke in a bewitching tone, "Do you want me to rescue you and Séraphine from the Hostel?"

"Is it possible?" Gabriel's face contorted, and his eyes revealed a mixture of yearning, as if his body and mind existed in different worlds.

Lumian took a step closer and spoke earnestly, "There is hope, but I need you to tell me all the details."

Gabriel's expression shifted between blankness, coldness, excitement, longing, and rejection, each emotion expressed vividly.

In that moment, he extended his hand, his eyes filled with intense fear.

Silently, Gabriel's form shattered, and the image of Auberge du Coq Doré disintegrated, along with the faint mist.

Lumian's eyes snapped open, and he found himself gazing at the ceiling of the second-floor bedroom in Salle de Bal Brise.

It had all been a dream, but it had felt incredibly real.

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

Franca, carrying the Primordial Demoness's statue, followed the black-cloaked man while remaining invisible.



The man appeared to have extensive experience and skill in evading pursuit. He frequently changed direction and even doubled back on his path.

If Franca hadn't relied on her invisibility and the assistance of the Primordial Demoness statue, she would have lost him several times.

Finally, the black-cloaked man came to a stop in front of an entrance to Underground Trier.

He half-turned and examined his palms under the crimson moonlight, leaving Franca perplexed.

What's going on? Is he performing palm-reading on himself? Remaining hidden behind a gas street lamp pole, the invisible Franca observed his actions with curiosity.

After a moment, the man descended the steel staircase and disappeared into the dim entrance.

Franca followed closely behind, venturing deeper into Underground Trier.

Twenty minutes later, the black-cloaked man reached a sealed tunnel.

It was unclear what he touched, but a stone door immediately swung open on the rock wall next to him.

Franca, standing a few meters away, looked over and saw three lamps embedded in the stone wall.

Three classic oil lamps, one high and two below, each with a flame burning inside.

Franca had been in Trier for a long time and had a good understanding of the situation here. This scene triggered a connection in Franca's mind.

Carbonari!

She recognized this as one of the symbols of the Carbonari, an organization seeking to overthrow the government. Lighting three lamps was symbolic in their ranks—the one above represented the sun, while the other two below symbolized the moon and the stars.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order collaborates with the Carbonari? Franca was both surprised and unsurprised.

From her perspective, the Iron and Blood Cross Order aimed to seize power in Intis itself by toppling the government, but their current focus seemed to be on the underground and the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier.

The black-cloaked man swiftly passed through the self-opening stone door, and Franca noticed a thin, ever-changing white fog emanating from inside.

This fog looks familiar. There must be something wrong... Franca hesitated to follow when she felt a slight tremor in her hidden pocket.

Franca reached out and touched it, her expression changing slightly.

The classic silver mirror had trembled slightly—the one connected to the underground mirror world!

Franca remained in her concealed position, watching the stone door slowly close without taking another step forward.

Beside the flowing underground river, the figure moved swiftly along the water.

He didn't use lanterns, carbide lamps, or other sources of light, yet he moved through the darkness with ease, navigating around potholes, rocks, and obstacles effortlessly.

Jenna, hidden behind a mottled stone pillar, noticed a flickering red light in the target's eye.

Taking a deep breath, she retrieved the ancient Arrow of the Bloodthirsty from her black coat and prepared herself for the confrontation.

Her combat experience wasn't limited, but it wasn't much either. In particular, she had never faced a Beyonder alone. All she could do was use everything in her arsenal to augment herself from the onset. She had to go all out to minimize any accidents.

Jenna plunged the obsidian arrow into her chest, letting it draw her blood and come to live.

Before the figure could approach, she sprinkled fluorescent powder over herself and chanted a Hermes incantation at an almost inaudible volume: "Body Concealment!"

With that, Jenna vanished completely, blending into the darkness, her movements masked by the sound of the underground river.

Moments later, the figure with the red eye arrived in the area. Jenna watched from the shadows.

Suddenly, the darkness came alive beneath the figure's feet, forming inky black chains that wrapped around the legs, waist, and torso.

The figure stopped abruptly, a red light shooting from its eye.

From behind, Jenna's form materialized.

Only then did Jenna get a clear look at her target. He was a man, holding a grayish-white cloth bag and wearing a dark gray robe similar to that of a monk. His face was a menacing sight, constructed with iron plates, gears, springs, screws, cranks, and other mechanical contraptions. There was a vivid red gem embedded in his right eye.

A monk from the Deep Valley Cloister? Jenna's heart raced. She hadn't anticipated Will targeting a monk from the God of Steam and Machinery Church.

She and Franca had crossed paths with similar monks in the Deep Valley Quarry before. These monks had augmented their bodies with mechanical modifications, giving them an eerie appearance.

Confronted with a target whose skull had transformed into metal, Jenna abandoned her initial plan of striking behind the ears. Instead, she concentrated a dark flame in her right palm and pressed it against the mechanical monk's head amidst the howling wind.

Simultaneously, a red beam shot forth, slicing through a few shackles resembling the Abyss. However, it only addressed the front. The other directions were already ensnaring the mechanically enhanced monk.

With a resounding impact, Jenna thrust the black flame into the target's head.

The silent yet menacing black flames expanded instantly, consuming the monk's Spirit Body and setting his spirituality ablaze.

Leveraging the high-speed agility granted by the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty, Jenna continuously shifted her position around the monk to evade counterattacks.

Simultaneously, she sought opportunities to weaken him to the fullest extent with the Demoness's black flames, bolstered by dark, binding spells.

In less than two minutes, the monk, unable to break free, collapsed to the ground, rendered unconscious and weakened.

Jenna exhaled and lowered herself to the ground.

She picked up the grayish-white cloth bag, untied the rope, and inspected its contents.

Inside, she found an array of canned paints and oil paintbrushes.

#### Chapter 458 Same Direction

She quickly recalled the Purifier's advice and the recent clues they had gathered: Keep a close watch on painters and individuals with painting as a private hobby, as it was likely that some of their works possessed supernatural abilities!

Could this monk be a passionate painter?

Or was he simply delivering paint and brushes to an artist?

It seems like a routine task, but the fact that he had chosen the depths of Underground Trier for this errand raises suspicion. It didn't appear to be a matter of time constraints...

Either there's a problem with his destination, or the painter he's looking for is problematic. Perhaps everything is problematic...

A barrage of thoughts raced through Jenna's mind, leading her to suspect a connection between the mechanically enhanced monk and the Hostel they were investigating.

It was possible that an artist with supernatural powers was working on murals underground, requiring a substantial supply of paint and tools!

Jenna decided to search the monk's robe for any clues, finding only a few coins and banknotes.

She placed these items in the same grayish-white cloth bag and secured it with a knot. As she examined the intricate mechanical components that comprised half of the monk's body, she contemplated using the Demoness's black flames to incapacitate him once more. Her plan was to transport him back to the surface for an "interrogation" with the help of Ciel, Franca, and Anthony.

Being a Witch, Jenna had mastered ritualistic magic related to spirit channeling, but she lacked practical experience and was concerned about making a mistake that might disrupt their lead. She also needed a safe prayer target, so she intended to leave this task to the experienced Lumian and Franca.

As Jenna was about to put her plan into action, multiple gears on the unconscious monk's face suddenly began to turn on their own,

producing an unsettling clicking and clacking noise. The mechanical parts came to life,

spinning wildly and devouring the flesh and blood on the other side of the monk's body, turning it into a gruesome mess.

The scene resembled a horrific accident in a factory where an operator had fallen into a massive machine.

Jenna's instincts immediately warned her of impending danger, but before she could react, the mechanical parts, along with her own flesh and blood, lunged towards her.

Amidst the coexisting sounds of cracking and creaking, she transformed into a mirror, shattering inch by inch.

Jenna managed to reappear approximately ten meters away from the underground river.

Without looking back, she swiftly grabbed the grayish-white cloth bag and the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty embedded in her chest. She darted around the rock wall, making a hasty escape to the surface.

Behind her, the sounds of metal grinding and colliding persisted, but they couldn't catch up to her. Gradually, the commotion began to subside.

Finally, Jenna heard the crisp sound of metal parts falling to the ground, and she couldn't help but let out a relieved sigh as she slowed her pace.

Jenna ran until she reached a named location in Underground Trier, where she finally slowed down and carefully removed the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty from her chest.

She could feel her strength waning due to the loss of blood, but she was grateful for her earlier caution in not removing the obsidian arrow from her chest when the monk had fainted. She had chosen to complete the search with it embedded in her.

If not for that, she might have been caught by the menacing mechanical body before having the opportunity to use the mystical item once more.

As Jenna assessed her surroundings and sought out the underground Avenue du Marché, she reflected on her harrowing experience. It felt as though the chilling tales Franca and Ciel had shared, along with their horrifying abilities, had become a reality.

The parts of the monk's body that had undergone mechanical enhancements had assumed an eerie lifelike state!

And the revived machinery was devouring human flesh and blood!

This is the true nature of the mystical world, where Beyonder powers are accompanied by unimaginable perils... Jenna turned onto the underground Avenue du Marché and made her way towards the stairs that would lead her back to the surface.

Simultaneously, she couldn't shake the suspicion that the enigmatic monk and the sinister secret cave she and Franca had stumbled upon in the Deep Valley Quarry were somehow linked to the impending catastrophe.

After the stone door closed, and the dark tunnel fell silent, Franca emerged from her hiding place and remained invisible as she returned to the surface.

She replayed the scene she had just witnessed, trying to pinpoint the source of the familiar feeling emanating from the ever-shifting thin white fog.

Just as she was on the verge of resorting to Magic Mirror Divination or Dream Divination to find answers, a memory resurfaced.

She recalled the moment she and Jenna had eliminated the Deep Valley Cloister's Warlock-dressed man underground. A similar fog had appeared in the mirror during their spirit channeling!

The other party's exploded corpse transformed into a blood mist, revealing the corresponding characteristics, but the colors were different!

007 had informed us that by the time the Purifiers arrived in Deep Valley Town, their target had already shifted. The items on the altar were gone, leaving behind only cryptic words on certain papers...

Those words were Albert Goncourt, Underground, Riot, and Time... Albert Goncourt is one of the leaders of the Carbonari... and this aligns with the three oil lamps I had seen moments ago! Could it be that the Iron and Blood Cross Order is collaborating with the Carbonari to incite a riot, possibly involving monks from the Deep Valley Cloister?

Hiss, could it be that the item Gardner Martin used to smuggle "Rat" Christo into Trier was requested by the Carbonari?

Is it located not far behind that stone door? Is that why my ancient silver mirror reacted?

Franca gradually connected the dots.

She realized the urgency of reporting this matter. Though it wasn't directly related to their primary mission of finding the Hostel, it seemed far from a trivial issue. If it escalated, it could lead to another catastrophe, and Franca felt compelled to do her best to prevent it.

In the next moment, Franca pondered her options.

Should I report to the Tarot Club, the Demoness Sect, or inform the authorities through 007?

She quickly made up her mind.

Only children choose to do multiple-choice questions. Adults select them all!

The only thing to be concerned about was that the reports weren't sent to the wrong parties.

Lumian awoke from his dream, his mind filled with questions as he slowly sat up and surveyed his surroundings.

There were no signs of Madam Magician pursuing Gabriel at the Hostel.

Madam Magician didn't realize that Gabriel had used a dream to warn me to escape Trier immediately? That's impossible. This lady possessed the ability to enter and exit my dreams at will in Cordu, and she is known to be the bane of these special monsters. Even Bouvard's lifeless body, which should have been untouchable, hadn't been spared when she dragged it away... Lumian paced back and forth in the room, pondering the puzzling situation.

He couldn't believe that Madam Magician wasn't paying attention. She had the means to observe from a distance, so there was no urgency in rushing to Salle de Bal Brise.

The insight he gained from Conspirer's influence left Lumian with a nagging sense that the dream was not what it seemed.

To deceive Madam Magician while communicating with him indicated that there was something extraordinary about Gabriel or the Hostel itself!

As Lumian was only a Sequence 6 and lacked extensive knowledge of mysticism, he refrained from speculating and instead sat at his desk, taking up a pen and paper to write a letter.

Knowing the “doll” messenger's preferences, he decided to send the letter only after returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, patiently awaiting a response.

Before long, Madam Magician's reply arrived.

“I didn't notice Gabriel influencing your dream.

“Initial considerations are:

“You have a close connection to the Hostel.”

There's a close connection between me and the Hostel? Lumian's forehead twitched as he read the message, feeling as if a bucket of ice-cold water had been poured over his head.

How is that possible?

When did I establish such a bond with the Hostel?

Could it be that Gabriel used this connection to conceal himself from Madam Magician's scrutiny and directly influence my dream?

Lumian found Madam Magician's hypothesis absurd, but he couldn't help but analyze the possibilities.

As Lumian pondered the situation, a sudden realization struck him like a bolt of lightning.

Maipú Meyer!

Susanna Mattise's lover, the ostracized key member of the Bliss Society, the former manager of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, who had claimed to be returning to the market district to do something!

Could it be that Maipú Meyer had secretly done something in the market district that led to my unexplained close connection with the Hostel?

He wants to prove himself. I'm definitely one of the targets... Was it his plan for me to establish a close connection with the Hostel and detonate it at a critical moment?

How did he do it? I had a close connection to the Hostel without realizing it... Lumian subconsciously glanced at his left chest and suspected that Termiboros, the traitor, might have played a role in this matter.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have failed to notice anything amiss.

Amidst his surprise, Lumian didn't panic. Instead, he felt a sense of joy.

I wonder if I can use my close connection to the Hostel to find that place...

When the time comes, I might have the opportunity to meet the Sansons and have the support of numerous Major Arcana card holders...

Just as Lumian was about to write and inquire about Madam Magician, he heard soft footsteps approaching his room.

Knock, knock, knock. There was a gentle knock on the door of Room 207.

Lumian opened the door and was surprised to find Franca and Jenna standing there.

One of them wore a garish blouse, and the other was dressed as a female mercenary. Their expressions were serious.

Franca felt the need to communicate with Lumian before writing a report. "We've discovered something significant."

You've found something important too? Lumian was taken aback, pointing at the ceiling.

"Call Anthony over as well."

Nearly fifteen minutes later, Franca and Jenna shared their experiences in Room 207 of Auberge du Coq Doré, carefully omitting details about the Demoness Sect and Will.

As Lumian listened, his brow furrowed.

Some of the Deep Valley Cloister monks are suspected to be linked to the Hostel and the impending catastrophe?

That was an important cloister of the God of Steam and Machinery Church!

Lumian couldn't help but rub his temples, recollecting that something unusual had also occurred at the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Sacred Heart Cloister.

Are the two Churches no longer as reliable?

Could Trier still be saved? Could there be a future?

#### Chapter 459 Price of Bestowment

A few seconds later, Lumian flashed a self-deprecating smile.

"At the very least, those monks at the Deep Valley Cloister are still discreet when they're up to no good. It means they still have reservations, which suggests that the entirety of the God of Steam and Machinery Church isn't problematic. A significant number of clergymen, or maybe even the majority, are normal."

"I think so too," Anthony Reid agreed, raising his hand and drawing a triangle on his chest.

Lumian continued, "At this point, this is no longer something a small team like ours can handle. It's best to leave the Deep Valley Cloister's problem to the Purifiers and the Machinery Hivemind."

What he didn't say was that the Tarot Club would keep a close watch. After all, no one knew how many hidden dangers were waiting to emerge within the two Churches. What if someone triggered them prematurely, delaying the investigation of the Deep Valley Cloister?

"Alright," Franca concurred; it was her original plan to begin with.

With the plan confirmed, Franca and Jenna left Auberge du Coq Doré and returned to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian drew back the curtains, gazing at the crimson moon in the sky. Casually, he said to Anthony Reid, who was about to leave, “Your best option now is to head to Suhit's steam locomotive station as soon as you wake up tomorrow and purchase a ticket to leave Trier. The sooner the departing train, the better.”

Anthony, dressed in military-green camouflage, halted in his tracks, slowly turning around, his gaze locked on Lumian's retreating figure.

“Oh?”

Lumian poured himself a glass of light beer, which served as potable water, and took a sip. He continued to peer out the window and said, “You've been with us recently, and you've learned a lot. You should be able to discern the looming issue in Trier. The impending catastrophe will be dire. If you don't depart quickly, you might never get the chance.

“As for seeking revenge, for finding Philip, who faked his death, we can wait until the catastrophe is over. There's no rule stating you can't return after leaving Trier.”

Anthony Reid fell into silence for a few seconds before slowly joining Lumian at his side. He too gazed at the night sky and asked, “Why aren't you leaving?”

Lumian replied with a smirk, “Aren't you a Spectator? Can't you see we're on a mission? How can we just leave Trier like that?”

Anthony turned his head to fix his stare on Lumian's face and eyes, remaining silent for a long while.

Lumian held the light beer in his hand, his gaze still fixed outside the window. His eyes were vacant, and his focus seemed clouded.

After a while, he scoffed.

“Besides, I have the ability to survive such a disaster. I can protect Franca and Jenna, but only the two of them. Do you think you can compare to beautiful women who have a deeper relationship with me?”

His “protection” referred to teleporting Franca and Jenna to The Fool's cathedral at the Lavigny Docks.

Anthony didn't respond and looked at the dark sky outside once more.

Slowly, he retrieved a box of cigarettes from his shirt, took one out, placed it between his lips, and lit it with a match.

Taking a few deep breaths and exhaling white smoke, the Psychiatrist muttered to himself, “I was born and raised on the West Midseashire Coast. It's an area with many industrial cities, where the God of Steam and Machinery has more believers than the Eternal Blazing Sun.



“The wind in Midseashire is fierce. Summers aren't very hot, but they're humid. Winters bring snow, and everything is covered in white. The surroundings are either thick forests or pockmarked with coal and iron ore mines.

“When I was fortunate enough to become a Beyonder, my greatest dream was to retire safely from the army with some savings. I'd buy land near my hometown, close to the forest. I'd hire a few people to help me with farming. In my free time, I'd secretly hunt in the forest, breathe the sea air, or go fishing. Heh heh, you might not know this, but the fish in Midseashire are inedible due to heavy industrial pollution. Locals only eat it if they have no other choice.”

Anthony Reid's voice deepened.

“If I were to return to the West Midseashire Coast and my hometown now, I might never be able to enjoy such a life. It's not about money; I need a sense of relaxation.

“I still have nightmares about our camp being ambushed, with corpses everywhere. Every time, I can feel my heart racing. I can imagine that if I leave tomorrow and see the news and photos of the Trier catastrophe in the newspapers, I'll have similar nightmares. I'll dream of Trier being incinerated by flames, with corpses strewn everywhere.

“That time, I fled out of fear. This time, I don't want to do that again.”

Anthony Reid took another drag on his cigarette.

Without waiting for Lumian's mockery, he added, “I'm well aware of my limitations, and all of this doesn't directly concern me. However, I've been in Trier for several years. I know many informants, neighbors, and children who will trade information for sweets or copper. I don't want to hear about their deaths in a few days and see their pained faces when I close my eyes.

“I'll do my best to cooperate with you and do what I can. Only when there's no other choice will I consider retreating.

“You don't need to understand. This might be the paranoid decision of a patient with severe psychological problems.”

Lumian chuckled and commented, “You make it sound as if nobody else has psychological problems.”

Before completing my treatment, my psychological problems were far worse than yours!

A smile appeared on Anthony Reid's face.

“So, you chose to stay too, didn't you?”

He turned around and left Room 207, puffing on his short cigarette.

Lumian relished the night view of Trier, the enduring cacophony of Rue Anarchie serving as a backdrop to his contemplation. He emptied his glass of light beer.

Then, he took his seat, drew the curtains, and commenced writing to Madam Magician.

“New leads...

“There are now three investigation directions:

“Firstly, the Deep Valley Cloister and the Sacred Heart Cloister.

“Secondly, I can use the strong connection between myself and the Hostel to infiltrate the underground route that Jenna followed when she encountered the monk by the river. By following my instincts, I can attempt to reach the Hostel directly.

“Thirdly, an assault on Gardner Martin. Since the Iron and Blood Cross Order collaborates with the Carbonari, which is linked to the Deep Valley Cloister incident, they might be involved and have valuable information.”

After dispatching the letter, Lumian paced his room, grappling with a mixture of worry, frustration, and anticipation.

Before long, Magician replied:

“We'll take responsibility for the first direction. I refrained from mentioning the second direction because it poses a significant risk to you. Furthermore, Gabriel's warning has likely been detected, so the Hostel will be on high alert against such intrusions.

“We can cautiously explore the third direction, but you must be well-prepared before confronting Gardner Martin.”

Silently, crimson flames erupted, setting the paper in Lumian's hand ablaze. He planned to get some rest to recover from mental fatigue. At dawn, he would convene with Franca, Jenna, and Anthony to discuss their plan of action.

Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Franca hadn't changed into her cotton pajamas; she was still dressed in her daytime attire.

Observing her pacing the room, Jenna asked, her brow furrowed in confusion, “What's bothering you?”

Franca sighed and replied, “I intend to seek out Gardner now. Although Ciel didn't mention it just now, I can sense that he will propose dealing with Gardner in the next two days. This is a clear breakthrough. Sigh, I must seize the opportunity to digest more Pleasure.”

Jenna regarded Franca's profile, pursing her lips before changing the topic.

“Don't you have many lovers? Even without Gardner Martin, there are others.”

Franca couldn't help but clear her throat and smile wryly.

“Long gone, long gone. Gardner and his lovers are my current interests.”

Jenna chuckled and playfully teased, "Without Gardner Martin, you can turn to Ciel."

"No, no!" Franca waved her hand vigorously. "I can't get past myself."

With those words, she headed toward the door.

"I'm going to Rue des Fontaines."

Jenna's smile faded as she offered a solemn reminder, "Don't display any unusual behavior later."

"I understand," Franca replied, her expression turning serious. "I won't let Gardner feel like I'm giving him hospice."

With that, she opened the door and exited.

Jenna let out a soft sigh as she watched Franca vanish behind the closed door.

Then, her gaze turned to the grayish-white cloth bag on the coffee table, and she muttered to herself, "I wonder when I'll encounter Will to deliver this bag..."

In the middle of the night, Jenna awoke suddenly from a vivid dream.

In her dream, she found herself in an underground quarry cave, with Will standing before her.

Although it was only a dream, Jenna had an uncanny sense of familiarity with the location and knew how to reach it in reality.

Understanding the significance of her dream, Jenna nodded slowly and changed into her female mercenary attire. Carrying the grayish-white cloth bag, she left Apartment 601 and ventured underground through the entrance on Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Following the revelations of her dream and guided by her spirituality, she descended, turned, and squeezed through gaps at times. Finally, she arrived at the quarry cave she had seen in her dream.

In the center of the mine, Will, dressed as he had been during the day, held an orange jack-o'-lantern. He didn't appear particularly pleased, resembling a student caught playing hooky by parents and teachers.

"Is this what you want?" Jenna handed him the grayish-white cloth bag filled with various paints and brushes.

Will accepted it but didn't open the bag. Instead, he retrieved an item known as the lucky gold coin and sighed.

"This is your reward."

"This is both your luck and misfortune. It signifies that you will encounter many things and bear significant responsibility."

"You may not fully grasp it now, but one day, you will."

Ever since the heretics brought catastrophe to the market district, there's been no turning back for me... Only by forging ahead in this perilous world of mysticism can I protect those I care about... Jenna silently mused, taking the Loen gold pound. She inspected it and inquired, "How should I use it?"

“Simply keep it with you,” Will advised, waving his hand before vanishing into the depths of the quarry cave, clutching his jack-o'-lantern.

Jenna stowed the lucky gold coin and made her way back to the surface. To her astonishment, she found that she couldn't recall the route she had taken.

While she had arrived guided by her spirituality, she was now fully awake and devoid of the same guidance.

Jenna had no choice but to navigate her way independently, following a general principle of “ascending.”

After walking for some time, the ground suddenly shook violently, as if an explosion had occurred in the distance.

An earthquake or some other anomaly? Jenna furrowed her brow and quickened her pace to find a path leading upward.

As she turned a corner around a rock wall, her feet abruptly gave way.

The ground had already caved in, and now, it had completely collapsed.

Amidst the deafening sounds of collapse, Jenna couldn't react in time and tumbled deeper as the ground disintegrated.

She swiftly adjusted her body and activated her Assassin abilities, allowing her to descend gracefully like a feather.

## Chapter 460 Chain Reaction

Clad in a white priest's robe and a clergyman's bonnet, Horamick Haydn gazed at the open mine entrance, his benevolent and gentle face veiled in shadows.

After the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery lost all its dioceses in the Loen Kingdom, the former Archbishop of Backlund, a member of the Divine Council, returned to the headquarters in Intis. Over the past few years, he had traveled to various places like a firefighter, handling various serious Beyonder incidents.

He understood better than most clergymen of the God of Steam and Machinery Church that, despite the outward appearance of peace, the world was riddled with festering wounds. Problems abounded, and hidden dangers lurked in the darkness. The orthodox Churches and government organizations could only strive to maintain stability.

Horamick collected his thoughts and sighed silently. He turned to the Machinery Hivemind deacon beside him and declared, “Let's take action. God will protect us. By steam!”

As he spoke, he drew a Triangular Sacred Emblem on his chest.

The burly Machinery Hivemind deacon issued the command for purification, and the members of the Hivemind sprang into action. Some raised iron-black barrel-shaped objects, while others shouldered weapons resembling steam firearms, devoid of backpacks or golden ammunition belts. Still, others produced leather scrolls, charms crafted from various metals, and some pointed rings, canes, and other objects forward.

Rumble!

The miniature sun-like golden fireball was the first to blast out of a cannon barrel, landing at the heart of the quarry cave.

Behind it followed a cascade of colorful “cannonballs” and bullets of varying shapes. The light and dispersed waves purged the entire Deep Valley Quarry repeatedly, maintaining the cave's structural integrity, resulting in only a slight collapse.

After a few rounds of purification, the concealed cave within the quarry was breached, unveiling its interior.

Horamick's eyes gleamed with an inhuman, dark-red light. He could clearly discern that the white mist within the secret cave had nearly dissipated entirely. Human arms and legs were embedded in the rock walls on either side.

The archbishop advanced, leading two squads of Machinery Hivemind members through the quarry and into the concealed cave.

Before entering, he cast a glance back at the nearby Deep Valley Cloister, closely monitored by Trier's archbishop with Sealed Artifacts.

Horamick studied the human arms and legs attached to gears, crankshafts, and other mechanical components, resembling experimental subjects.

Under the deacon's orders, the Machinery Hivemind members initiated another round of purification. They persisted until the arms, legs, and machinery had turned to ashes or fragments, allowing them to proceed further into the secret cave and descend the tunnel.

After several iterations, Horamick and the Machinery Hivemind members, their pale-white hair concealed by clergyman bonnets, reached a vast, laboratory-like chamber.

Here, human arms intertwined with machinery, following ceiling tracks, perpetually gripping cabinets, sinks, long tables, and iron boxes, moving them toward the blazing fire at the deepest part of the hall.

A few human corpses were piled in the chamber, and a humanoid figure made entirely of machinery stood among them.

This mechanical being stood at a towering height of over three meters. One of his cybernetic eyes resembled an emerald, while the other resembled a ruby, supported by numerous components. His temples were encased in a transparent special material, revealing the squirming grayish-white brain within.

The mechanical giant cast a glance at Horamick and the others, who were scattered at the entrance of the chamber, and emitted a metallic chuckle.

“Surprised, are you? I don't require steam to power myself or a human body to control me. I can perform any task just like a normal person, including combat. Unfortunately, my Sequence isn't high enough to replace the human brain.

“Seeing this, you have no reason to doubt, right? We are the chosen children of God. We follow the true teachings of God, while your spirits and flesh have been tainted by

the pleasures and indulgence of the mortal world, causing you to abandon the throne of God!"

Horamick surveyed the surroundings and noticed that the Machinery Hivemind members present remained extraordinarily vigilant and resolute. He nodded in approval.

Turning his attention to the mechanical giant, his benevolent expression remained undisturbed.

"You used a spirituality gem, didn't you?"

"Using humans to refine spirituality gems is even more ruthless and wasteful than employing steam to drive them.

"Claude, I thought you were momentarily lost and would gradually return to your senses within the Deep Valley Cloister. I didn't anticipate that you would become a heretic!"

"Heretic?" The mechanical giant laughed. "You are the heretics! When was the last time any of you received a revelation?"

"All the time," Horamick responded with composure. "Claude, tell me, where is the Hostel? Are you in league with those evil gods to set your sights on Fourth Epoch Trier?"

In his mechanical giant form, Claude's eyes emitted red and green lights as he spoke with solemnity,

"You have strayed from the teachings of God. You no longer possess the spirit of sacrifice.

"The future of this world and the chance for a deity to ascend to the pinnacle lies within Fourth Epoch Trier. The sooner we unlock it, the greater our hope!"

Without waiting for Horamick's reply, the mechanical giant declared coldly, "I will show you who the heretics are and who the true followers of God are!"

As soon as Claude finished speaking, the light in his cybernetic eyes flared, and the entire chamber trembled. The sounds of machinery in operation resonated with an enigmatic aura.

In an instant, the Machinery Hivemind members, who had been on the verge of unleashing their firepower, witnessed projected paintings depicting the evolution of humans emerging from obscurity, advancing step by step, and building civilizations at various stages.

These paintings were ethereal, weighty, delicate, and magnificent. Horamick and his companions seemed to transform into the people within the paintings, experiencing the gravity and splendor of civilization.

At that moment, a face appeared "outside the painting."

This figure wore a towering crown, with his nostrils decayed to the point where only two black holes remained. His eyes were filled with countless overlapping star charts, and they stared greedily at Horamick and the others, as well as their civilization.

Silently, more faces pressed against the surface of the painting. Some had their heads bisected by a ruler, while others were adorned with yellow paper covered in strange symbols. Some were covered in ears of wheat and rice, while others barely took on human forms, their bodies adorned with various symbols.

These faces were larger than Horamick and his companions combined. They stared fixedly at the scene through the painting.

The Machinery Hivemind members who beheld these faces experienced a profound fear from the depths of their hearts, as though their entire civilization would be obliterated.

Just as they were on the verge of losing control, the faces vanished mysteriously, just as they had appeared.

The scene before Horamick's eyes reverted to its normal state. The mechanical giant Claude and the frenziedly operating chamber reentered his field of vision.

The archbishop remained unruffled, though his voice resonated with anger.

“Heretics!”

As his voice reverberated, he flexed his left wrist with his right hand, unveiling a black, cold, and weighty metal tube.

The sound of gears clicking filled the chamber, illuminating it as brightly as daylight.

The Machinery Hivemind members launched their attacks in succession.

Rumble!

The Deep Valley Quarry experienced a distinct tremor, as though a brief, violent earthquake had struck.

In Underground Trier, just outside the stone door through which the Carbonari had disappeared, crimson fireballs hovered in the air, casting a warm glow in the dark tunnel.

Blazing Danitz, dressed in a linen shirt, a brown jacket, dark pants, and black leather boots, had one hand in his pocket as he fixed his gaze on the nearby stone door.

His burnt-yellow hair and eyebrows framed his face, and he casually held a weed in his mouth, surveying the surroundings with his dark-blue yet bright eyes.

Nearly 20 men, all dressed as sailors, silently fanned out in the vicinity. Some twirled daggers, others wiped the barrels of their revolvers, and a few stretched their necks in anticipation.

A grinning, brown-haired sailor finally broke the silence and questioned Blazing Danitz, “Captain, why are we aiding the Intis government in pursuing the Carbonari? And why are we doing it for free?”

Danitz glanced at him, spat out the weed from his mouth, and muttered under his breath, “Damn fools, do you want to see Trier in ruins? Are you lads not still Intisian?”

As he spoke, he swung his fist at the stone door.

Doesn't this group of assholes not know that their captain owns numerous properties in Trier?

Upon the surface of Danitz's clenched fist, blazing white flames gathered as he thrust forward. Eventually, they coalesced into a fireball emitting a destructive aura.

Boom!

The ground shook, and the stone door shattered.

Jenna descended gracefully in the seemingly endless darkness, occasionally brushing against gravel but escaping physical harm.

After what felt like an eternity of descent, her feet finally touched solid ground.

Her beautiful blue eyes reflected a building.

It was a slightly crooked beige house. The lower three floors bore the architectural marks of Roselle's era, featuring pillar walls, arches, and large windows. The top two floors, in stark contrast, seemed crudely appended as an afterthought.

This is... Jenna was visibly taken aback.

The building before her was one she recognized all too well.

It was Auberge du Coq Doré!

At that moment, light streamed from numerous rooms within Auberge du Coq Doré. Jenna spotted a man and a woman, standing on the third-floor balcony, wrapped in each other's embrace.

The man sported black-framed glasses, his neatly combed brown hair adding to his refined appearance. As for the woman, she wore a lake-blue dress, her plump face and ethereal brown eyes creating a curious juxtaposition.

Thud, thud. Jenna's heart raced.

She had never actually met the woman, but she was familiar with the man.

It was the missing playwright, Gabriel!