

Inevitability 551

Chapter 551 Coming One After Another

As Lumian observed Noelia disappearing down the corridor, he pondered the idea of adding another catchphrase: “You Feynapotterians.”

Nevertheless, Noelia's kindness served as a reminder that delving into the sea prayer ritual wasn't a straightforward endeavor. The associated risks demanded the Church of Earth Mother's serious consideration.

Despite this, Lumian believed that many dangers could be sidestepped, and he wasn't inclined to actively confront them.

His primary objective wasn't to unveil the truth behind the sea prayer ritual and eradicate the influence of folklore on Port Santa, preventing its inhabitants from transforming into monsters. His true goal lay in unraveling the details of the April Fool's prank to track down Ultraman and Bard, executing them one by one. With Port Santa plagued by numerous problems and abscesses, Lumian saw no need to expose them; he could withdraw in a timely manner.

Concealing his true motives was a fundamental principle of acting as a Conspirer!

This could lead others to misinterpret his decisions and react incorrectly during critical moments.

After shutting the door, Lumian grabbed the golden straw hat and settled into the recliner. Smirking at the corridor, he muttered to himself with interest, Who will be the next to provide information?

Rubió Paco, who clearly dislikes the Maidens of the Sea and detests such matters, or the families who have lost their positions as committee members of the Fisheries Guild for many years?

Beneath the bright sunlight outside the window, Lumian swiftly flipped through the textbooks he had purchased, hoping to memorize and grasp more relevant knowledge. He couldn't wait until the charms' effects wore off, leaving nothing in his mind.

About an hour later, unfamiliar footsteps echoed through the corridor.

Knock, knock, knock. Another knock resonated on his door.

“Who is it?” Lumian inquired in simple Highlander.

“The book you bought has arrived,” the motel owner, Otta Guillaume, replied in Intisian.

The book I bought? When have I ever bought a book? Lumian pondered, standing up thoughtfully. He opened the door and received a cheaply packaged but colorful book from the old man.

The title of the book was “Travel around Feynapotter.”

Lumian pretended not to get the title written in Highlander and chuckled at himself.

“I'll have to wait for my interpreter to swing back and decode it for me. Might not even wrap my head around it before I bid Feynapotter farewell by flipping through a dictionary.”

Otta Sr. expressed his understanding.

“When I first landed in Port Santa, seven or eight mates shared an Intisian-

Highlander dictionary. None of us dared to venture out solo. But after hanging around a bit and pushing ourselves to chat with the locals, we gradually got the hang of it. Truth be told, Highlander's quite similar to Intisian.”

Lumian chatted briefly with Otta Sr. before heading back to his room, sinking into the recliner with “Travel around Feynapotter” in hand.

He turned the book over, gripping its spine and giving it a shake.

A folded white paper tumbled out.

Lumian caught it and flicked it open with a swift motion.

Written on it was Intisian:

“The Maidens of the Sea are also not allowed to leave Port Santa or tie the knot with outsiders. But exceptions have cropped up over the years.

“Feynapotter's women dig romance before tying the knot and chase after love. The ladies of Port Santa are no different. Throughout the past millennium, plenty of Maidens of the Sea have bolted to preserve their love or freedom. Around 30 to 40 have made it out. The most recent case dates back over 20 years. A Maiden of the Sea married an Intisian and had a kid. We're unsure if she's still alive because the Fisheries Guild has been hunting her down.

“Her child's name is Nolfi. You might know her. She's already back in Port Santa.”

Nolfi? Batna Comté's lover? She's actually a child of a Maiden of the Sea. She even dragged her “partner” to Port Santa to witness the sea prayer ceremony... Lumian sometimes felt something was off with Nolfi while on the Flying Bird, but he never guessed she was so tied up with the sea prayer ritual.

This made him wonder about Nolfi's real reasons for returning to Port Santa. Batna Comté might find himself in a mind-boggling mess over this romantic fling.

Lumian's eyes shifted down as he read the last line.

“Once you're out of these waters and Port Santa, the mystical powers from the sea prayer ritual weakens significantly. Against folks from other regions, the Fisheries Guild mostly wrangles them using adventurers, bounty hunters, and professional assassins.”

Is this a go ahead to meddle with the sea prayer ritual and dig into it? As long as I could slip out of Port Santa and these waters, the Fisheries Guild's committee members would be powerless against me? Lumian had no clue about the identity of the person who delivered the paper and the intel. After all, he hadn't seen many folks' handwriting in Port Santa, but he could unmistakably sense their eagerness and anticipation.

Crimson flames roared to life, consuming the white paper laden with information. Lumian reclined, sipping on Feynapotter Kingdom's famed Manzan, the top-tier white wine produced in specific regions without dilution. He absentmindedly flipped through the book "Travel around Feynapotter" penned in Highlander.

The author raved about Feynapotter Kingdom's diverse culinary delights, praising beef, mutton, and pork while expressing disdain for the local tobacco, likening it to smoking chili.

After a stretch, Lugano returned to the suite with Ludwig, bearing a stack of street snacks—roasted baby octopuses, lamb loin, fried fish, potatoes, corn omelet, and pork rolls.

Lumian had long set aside "Travel around Feynapotter." He rose and addressed Lugano, "Don't forget to change your appearance tomorrow to fetch our new IDs. Also, figure out where Batna Comté will be in the next two days. I want to share a drink with him." "Alright, alright." Lugano couldn't fathom why his employer suddenly wanted to locate the finely dressed adventurer, but he sensed it wasn't as simple as a casual drink.

After assigning the task, Lumian grabbed the sun straw hat and casually mentioned as he sauntered toward the door, "I'm stepping out for a bit. I'll be back before dinner."

"D-do you need any translations?" Lugano asked instinctively.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"I'm just taking a stroll, getting a feel for the terrain. No need to chat with anyone. Don't worry, I won't lose my way."

Lugano tersely acknowledged and refrained from probing further.

He trusted that his employer's adept body language skills would make simple communication a breeze.

Once out of Solow Motel, Lumian ambled down the street.

He aimed to set the stage for those attempting to reach him and see if the Fisheries Guild would seize the chance to make a move.

Solow Motel, fifth-floor suite.

As Ludwig polished off the fermented grape juice, he leaped from the chair and headed briskly to the washroom.

Lugano slouched on the sofa, reluctant to budge.

After tending to the child for nearly two hours, fatigue had settled in. Lugano yearned for a break. His plan was to gather intel on Batna Comté and rendezvous with the spirited Feynapotter ladies at the bar later in the night.

Ludwig entered the washroom, lifted the toilet lid, and half-closed his eyes.

As he relieved himself with determination, a slim silhouette emerged from the shadows in the corner.

The black shadow took the form of an insect, about the thickness of a finger, with long bristles on its surface resembling spoiled food.

Its bristles fluttered, extending like tentacles, reaching out to touch everything in its path.

As it twisted, the black shadow silently crept up behind Ludwig. It abruptly stood up and plunged its head into Ludwig's cervical spine.

At that moment, it caught sight of the boy's brown eyes.

Abruptly, it froze, holding its shape like a snake rearing its upper body.

Ludwig, at some point, had ceased urinating and half-turned around.

He extended his right palm and seized the black shadow.

The shadow didn't put up a fight.

In the next instant, the chubby boy, Ludwig, shoved the black shadow into his mouth.

Amidst distinct chewing sounds, the lower half of the shadow's body twisted upward, melding with the blurry flesh in front of it.

In the blink of an eye, Ludwig consumed the black shadow as if it were a bowl of Feynapotter noodles.

He licked his lips, appearing as though he wanted another serving.

Outside Aquina Street, in the café adorned with flowers on every table.

Along the way, Lumian stumbled upon two street brawls. He snagged a skewer of Port Santa's roasted octopuses for a quick bite, yet no one approached him discreetly, attempted to stuff him with something, or whispered secret messages. There were no covert attacks.

Under the radiant sky and brilliant sun, he chose a quiet corner in a café, ordering a glass of Torres coffee with milk, relishing its rich bitterness with patience.

As time drifted by, a woman donned in a blue veil and an exquisite dress suddenly took a seat across from Lumian.

She scanned the surroundings and swiftly raised the blue fishnet hanging from the brim of her hat.

It wasn't a woman—it was a man.

A man dressed in women's attire, with distinctive features and grayish-blue eyes that couldn't conceal the anxiety on his face.

Lumian's pupils widened.

He recognized the man in the feminine garb.

It was the current Governor of the Sea!

The same Governor of the Sea whom Martha had bowed to in the cathedral-like building, served by numerous maids!

He sought me out? The one coming to me is actually him? Lumian was both astonished and oddly convinced that this made sense.

Noticing that the adventurer Louis Berry had identified him, the Governor of the Sea lowered the blue veil, shrouding his face once more.

Then, he hushed his voice and spoke in Highlander, filled with desire and concern, "Save me! Save me!"

Chapter 552 Fake and Reality

Lumian didn't find the current Governor of the Sea's plea for help surprising.

He raised his left hand and touched his ear. In Intisian, he asked, "What are you saying? I only understand the word 'help.'"

The current Governor of the Sea, disguised as a woman, appeared dumbfounded, as if the language barrier was unexpected.

Having racked his brains and risked his life to reach Louis Berry, the Governor of the Sea found himself unable to convey his request due to the language barrier!

Maintaining his pretense of not understanding Highlander, Lumian calmly took out a dark-red fountain pen and a stack of post-it notes, handing them over.

"Write down everything you want to say. I'll get someone to translate it."

This time, he used Intisian again but gestured with the fountain pen to guide the other party on what to do.

If the Governor of the Sea is illiterate and unable to write Highlander, it would be troublesome... I would have to resort to communicating with individual words and body language. I don't want to reveal my knowledge of Highlander yet... Lumian thought with concern.

In Intis and Feynapotter, there were numerous illiterate individuals.

The Governor of the Sea, after a brief moment of confusion, grasped Louis Berry's intentions. He took the fountain pen and note and began scribbling.

Lumian observed with a composed expression. Despite being on the opposite side, with a Hunter's vision and spatial imagination, he easily discerned the content of the written message:

"Please help me. Rescue me out of Port Santa! I'm not the true Governor of the Sea!"

Not the true Governor of the Sea... Lumian suppressed the urge to raise his eyebrows and refrained from directly asking, maintaining an appearance of complete ignorance of the words.

He desired to see what additional information the current Governor of the Sea would reveal before considering his next set of questions.

The man dressed in feminine attire paused for two seconds before continuing,

"The true Governor of the Sea died during last year's sea prayer ritual."

Dead? The genuine Governor of the Sea perished during the sea prayer ritual? Lumian felt a sudden surge of joy at this revelation.

I can finally see the tail of the key members of April Fool's!

One consequence of their prank last year was the predetermined Governor of the Sea's failure to successfully perform the sea prayer ritual. He suffered a backlash from Beyonder powers and lost his life!

This aligned with the revelations from Otta Guillaume, the Solow Motel owner, and his son, a government department clerk, regarding an increase in shipwrecks, a decline in fish harvests, and disrupted trade.

The imposter Governor of the Sea wrote swiftly, as if fearing someone might catch up to him at any moment.

“I was chosen by Juan Oro and the Fisheries Guild to impersonate the Governor of the Sea for a year because I resemble the true Governor of the Sea. This was to prevent fishermen and sea merchants from knowing about their grave mistake and the slip-up that caused the sea prayer ritual to fail. Such a failure has not occurred in recent centuries.

“Now that I know this secret, they won't let me leave alive. After the Governor of the Sea handover ritual is completed and the vigil begins, I'll undoubtedly be killed.

“I never wanted to play the role of Governor of the Sea. It was a blasphemy against the sea, but they pointed a gun at me, claiming they had already killed someone who refused to cooperate.

“The Church and the government won't intervene in the Fisheries Guild's affairs. You're the only one daring enough to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence and confront Juan Oro with a gun. I can only seek your help. Over the past year, I've saved up quite a bit of money. I can give it all to you—

100,000 gold risot!

“I've heard about your recent exploits. I believe you have the strength. I implore you to help me!”

Quite educated... Lumian, after studying the three completed post-it notes, sensed that the imposter Governor of the Sea differed from ordinary fishermen, vendors, or workers based on his grammar and vocabulary.

Phew... After jotting down his reasons and request, the fake Governor of the Sea set aside the fountain pen and slid three post-it notes filled with Highlander words to Lumian.

With a quick glance, Lumian contemplated using Highlander words and body language.

“Help? Your. Family?”

The fake Governor of the Sea hastily wrote down a response: “My parents passed away a few years ago. I don't have any other relatives. I was originally an employee of the Fisheries Company.”

It's no surprise Juan Oro and his associates dared to “kidnap” this person to be the Governor of the Sea. The Earth Mother Church refrains from meddling in the Fisheries Guild's internal affairs. If it

affects other citizens, they will still handle it... Lumian pretended to ask first and planned to find someone later to translate the response.

“Servant girls. Pregnant?”

He inquired about the maids in the Governor of the Sea's residence and the reason for their pregnancies.

The fake Governor of the Sea, concealed behind a blue veil, displayed no change in expression. His right hand trembled slightly as he wrote: “The Governor of the Sea will receive the same treatment as the ruler of Port Santa. He can appoint anyone from Milo Village, the Fisheries Guild, and those sea merchant families as his maids and guards. He can do whatever he wants and directly visit them, enjoying the treatment an owner can receive.

“I couldn't help it.”

Observing this, Lumian nearly laughed aloud.

Even in captivity, he's focused on such matters? Does he believe he can't escape and is resigned to his imminent demise? Is he seeking enjoyment while he still can?

The fake Governor of the Sea added: “I can also tax those people and forcefully allocate their market share, but they will listen to me. However, I dare not go too far. Otherwise, Juan Oro will privately whip me with his cane and threaten to kill me.”

So, this is the source of your savings? Well, he can't control the weather or the tides. After all, he's merely a false Governor... Lumian took the fake Governor of the Sea's new post-it note and pondered for a moment before asking in a clumsy manner, “Original. Governor. Where?”

He inquired about the whereabouts of the former Governors of the Sea.

Noelia, the combat nun of the Fertility Order, hadn't raised this issue before. It was unclear if she deemed it unimportant, chose not to disclose it for some reason, or lacked the corresponding information.

The fake Governor of the Sea wrote: “I don't know. I heard a maid from Milo Village mention it before. She's Juan Oro's granddaughter. She said that all the Governors of the Sea will eventually return to the sea.”

Return to the sea... That doesn't sound promising... Heh heh, designating Juan Oro's granddaughter as your maid. Are you seeking revenge for the oppression from her grandfather? And Juan Oro agreed to it, indirectly retaliating by lashing you? Juan Oro and his sons are married to Maidens of the Sea, and there's a chance his granddaughter is a lizard-like monster... How would you feel if you knew you were sleeping with a humanoid lizard? Lumian criticized the fake Governor of the Sea internally.

He seemed to ponder for a moment, as if unable to comprehend the other party's writing, and changed the question.

“Juan Oro. Powerful?”

The fake Governor of the Sea suddenly shuddered.

Swiftly, he wrote: "He's very powerful. He's a monster! He can suffocate people and cause them to die in pain!"

After writing this, the fake Governor of the Sea glanced at the sun outside the window. He set down the fountain pen, stood up, and bowed to Lumian.

Then, swaying in his elegant dress, he made his way toward the café's back door and departed.

He appeared anxious about his "disappearance" during the shopping trip potentially raising suspicions from the bodyguards.

Lumian observed his departure, crumpling the post-it notes into a ball in his palm.

Crimson flames trickled from between his fingers before swiftly dissipating.

After sprinkling the ashes into the bottle with flowers, Lumian picked up the partially finished Torres coffee and took a sip.

Lumian's mind raced as he analyzed the information that concerned him the most.

Is what the imposter said true? Could an ordinary person find an opportunity to escape their bodyguards and approach me? Is it possible that Juan Oro and the others secretly prompted him to set a trap for me, waiting for me to fall into it?

During the April Fool's prank, the specially crafted golden ring, lacking Beyonder powers, was concealed within the lamb's body. The lamb was taken as a sacrifice on the Governor of the Sea's ship...

Is April Fool's meant to substitute something with this ring? Is there another sacrificial ring similar to it?

Did the Governor of the Sea's appointment fail last year because the crucial sacrificial ring turned out to be a fake and couldn't be utilized?

This implies that key members of April Fool's or their subordinates are on the special ship. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to deceive the committee members of the Fisheries Guild and surreptitiously replace important items...

Based on the information I've gathered, there aren't many sailors on that ship. The only passengers are the Governor of the Sea, four Maidens of the Sea, and a few individuals guiding them through the ritual. Who among them is connected to April Fool's?

The Fisheries Guild must have conducted an investigation afterward. I wonder if they've drawn any conclusions...

I can't dismiss the possibility that the deceased Governor of the Sea is linked to April Fool's. Maybe he was completely deceived, thinking that by changing the ring and causing the ritual to fail, he could avoid returning to the sea like the previous Governors of the Sea. However, Bard, Mad Lady, and Ultraman may not have cared about his life at all...

What's the purpose of April Fool's? Is it merely a prank for their own amusement, or does it harbor a deeper motive?

Ordinary April Fool's members might engage purely for entertainment. As for the key members, truth and lies are invariably intertwined...

Sitting in the café until the sun neared the horizon, Lumian donned the straw hat and leisurely made his way back to the Solow Motel.

Late at night, Lugano returned from the bar, emanating the scent of alcohol. He approached Lumian and said,

“I've inquired with adventurers and bounty hunters about Batna and his lover. They all claim not to have seen them in the past few days. As soon as they arrived at Port Santa, it was as if they vanished.”

Vanished? Nolfi, being the child of a Maiden of the Sea, wouldn't be so clandestine if she were merely returning to Port Santa and the Fisheries Guild... Could she be involved in something related to the sea prayer ritual and convinced Batna to join her? Yet, they were targeted upon their return? Perhaps she possesses significant knowledge... I can't personally search for them right now. I need to be more visible as an adventurer... Lugano isn't the most reliable source... What about Noelia, the nun? A flurry of speculations raced through Lumian's mind.

As his thoughts raced, he suddenly realized the kind of assistance he should seek from the Knight of Swords.

Chapter 553 Half-Fairy

Lumian remained composed, not rushing to summon the messenger of the Minor Arcana, the Knight of Swords. His patience persisted as he waited for a particular individual.

Since expressing a strong desire to investigate the sea prayer ritual and taking action, only three waves of people had contacted him today, openly or covertly. Yet, the person he awaited the most had not shown up.

Maybe Rubió Paco prefers to wait until late at night when there's no one around? Shaking off his thoughts, he smiled at Lugano.

“Batna just began his fling with Nolfi. He might want to explore all the villages, towns, pastures, and vineyards around Port Santa before the sea prayer ritual. If you hear anything about him later, inform me. There's no need to deliberately inquire.”

Lugano didn't think it was a big deal and smiled understandingly.

“Maybe he even took on some missions along the way—earning some bucks while traveling.”

Once the interpreter and Ludwig retired to their rooms, Lumian settled into a recliner and casually perused the Highlander textbooks under the soft glow of the gas wall lamp.

As time passed, the night grew quieter.

Lumian, confirming no further intel would arrive that night, pondered the situation.

Stroking his chin, he pondered this matter.

It seems more people are observing. Unless the great adventurer's investigation makes a breakthrough and remains unscathed, they won't easily place their bets until I demonstrate greater reliability or value.

The trio who reached out today possesses distinct traits. One affiliated with the Earth Mother Church, insulated from losses even if their gamble fails. Would the Fisheries Guild risk confrontation with the cathedral and the Fertility Order?

The second, the imposter Governor of the Sea, faces high odds of death during the sea prayer ritual. He'd clutch at any chance for survival. Additionally, his lack of confidence in both the Earth Mother Church and Port Santa's government makes him value the adventurer capable of defeating the Demon Warlock more. However, his plea might be a trap by the Fisheries Guild.

The third, elusive figure hinted at useful clues without divulging the sea prayer ritual's secret...

After careful contemplation, Lumian gained deeper insight into the mindsets and choices of various factions.

Conspiracies often manipulated human emotions, exploiting the circumstances at hand. Lumian found himself increasingly fascinated by these two aspects.

This was both a daily routine and an essential necessity.

Putting aside the Highlander textbook, Lumian returned to his bedroom.

Closing the door, a black mark on his body emitted a faint glow.

Bottle of Fiction!

Lumian enveloped the entire room within the Bottle of Fiction. The entry conditions were simple—only spirit world creatures.

Ripple-like light briefly adorned the walls, floor, and ceiling of the bedroom before swiftly vanishing, leaving everything appearing entirely ordinary.

Only then did Lumian compose the letter and arrange the ritual. He sanctified the dagger, erected a wall of spirituality, and lit the candle representing him.

Stepping back, he spoke in ancient Hermes, "I!"

Then, switching to Hermes, he said, "I summon in my name:

"A peculiar creature wandering above the world, a half-fairy who fiddles with melodic strings, a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords..."

The orange candle flame transformed instantly into a deep blue hue, expanding to half the size of a human.

In the blue radiance, a figure of blood-red hue emerged from the candle flame.

Resembling a female human in form, it shared traits with a creature Lumian had encountered in Cordu's ruins. Devoid of skin or external coverings, it exposed bloody muscles, bluish-black blood vessels, ghastly white tendons, oily yellow fat, and large red or white fascia.

Lumian studied the 1.7-meter-tall Knight of Swords messenger and pondered silently, Does Half-Fairy mean it's divided internally?

I assumed it would be either split vertically or horizontally...

Don't you know how to fiddle with melodic strings? Where are they?

With these musings racing through his mind, Lumian handed the folded letter to the messenger and politely uttered in Hermes, "Kindly deliver this to the Knight of Swords."

As his strength grew, Lumian became increasingly aware that most messengers he encountered could be lethal—if unafraid to unleash the corruptive source, Termiboros.

Though Lumian couldn't gauge the strength of the Knight of Swords' messenger—the Half-Fairy—all his experience urged him to maintain politeness.

The black and white eyeballs of the Half-Fairy, embedded in the blood-colored face, darted around before gently nodding and accepting the letter.

It spoke with a clear, pleasant voice akin to a mountain stream's flow, "I'll deliver it promptly."

How melodious. It's like a bard strumming a guitar... Lumian snapped out of his reverie.

He suddenly grasped the reason for the messenger's melodic string prefix.

"Thank you." He bowed politely.

Observing the Half-Fairy about to retreat into the blue candle flame, Lumian couldn't suppress his curiosity and inquired, "What would you do if given human skin?"

The Half-Fairy fixed its black-and-white eyes on Lumian for a few seconds.

As it delved into the blue candle flame, it left behind a melodious voice, "I'll put it on."

You'll embody whoever's skin you wear? Has the Half-Fairy always sought its other half? Lumian speculated.

At that moment, he recalled an unfinished promise.

Help the Abscessed Hand find its body!

This pledge determined whether Lumian could attain godhood and advance to Sequence 4. However, being only a Sequence 6, he wasn't in a rush.

Late at night, in Trier's market district, within an empty room.

Franca, clad in an assassin suit, was having her first face-to-face encounter with 007.

As moments drifted by, 007 strode in, sporting a brown lion headgear and a double-breasted coat.

After confirming his identity, Franca pushed back her hood, emerging from the shadows.

"What brings us to this in-person discussion?" 007 inquired, his brow furrowed.

His instincts screamed to decline, yet he sensed the gravity of the situation. Failing to act promptly could result in a colossal catastrophe.

Ultimately, he acceded to Hidden Blade's request for a meeting.

Franca chuckled, emotions swirling within.

"It's a good thing."

“I'm skeptical when it comes from you, Hidden Blade,” 007 expressed his concern openly.

Franca clarified her reason for requesting an “offline” meeting, “It's true. I need your help to find someone. Telegrams can't convey a portrait. I can't craft a digital image using just words and dots, can I?”

007 regarded Franca with suspicion.

“Simply seeking help to locate someone? No ulterior motives?”

Franca chuckled.

“For now, that's all I can divulge.”

“That only heightens my apprehension.” 007 keenly sensed the search for this individual might harbor a crucial issue. Otherwise, Hidden Blade, having witnessed catastrophic events, wouldn't have taken it so seriously. She wouldn't have insisted on an offline meeting and handing over the portrait personally. More likely, she would have left it somewhere for retrieval.

Franca produced a portrait, drawn through dream divination and ritualistic magic, and passed it to 007.

Upon receiving it, 007's hand naturally emitted a sunlight-like glow, revealing the photo-like drawing in the dark night.

The depicted figure wore a black robe, with his head slightly turned, revealing very short dark hair that seemed freshly grown. The facial contours on his side profile were gentle, and his sickly pale-white skin contrasted with his dark brown eyes, which were not sunken enough.

Initially, 007 perceived nothing remarkable, but trusting Hidden Blade's knack for stirring trouble, he scrutinized it for more than ten seconds.

Beneath the lion's headgear, his brow furrowed as he whispered, “This doesn't seem like someone from any country in the Northern Continent.”

Franca smiled playfully and self-deprecatingly.

“Don't you think he resembles us from before we transmigrated?”

007 froze, as if struck by lightning.

He studied the drawing repeatedly and fell silent for nearly 20 seconds before saying,

“Hidden Blade, do you understand what you're saying?”

Franca raised her head slightly and said in a deep voice, “I suspect he came from that country from our world.

“Muggle, I, and the others found signs of interaction between both worlds before!”

“When? What signs?” 007 interjected, fighting the urge to grab Hidden Blade's shoulder and shake her for every bit of information.

Franca chuckled.

“I'm not at liberty to answer you. I can only reveal it after discussing with Muggle and the others. There are many secrets involved. First, discreetly search for the person in the portrait. I encountered him on the fourth level of the catacombs.”

007 struggled to contain his impatience, resisting the temptation to handcuff Hidden Blade for details. Through gritted teeth, he said, “Can't you guys discuss it first before involving me?”

I was just considerate of your emotions, afraid that you'd lose control upon receiving so much information at one go... Franca let out a hollow laugh and replied,

“It's not time to meet Muggle and the others yet. I need to find him urgently, afraid he might leave Trier.

“Calm down, calm down. You can't hide your desire to kill me.”

Franca smiled sheepishly, fading into the shadows.

Holding the portrait, 007 took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

Feynapotter Kingdom, Port Santa, Solow Motel.

After breakfast, Lumian had just returned to the master bedroom when he sensed a sudden chill.

Simultaneously, a tarot card materialized on the desk.

The card depicted a knight running with a sword in hand.

Minor Arcana card, Knight of Swords!

Chapter 554 Favor

Lumian's gaze fixated on the Minor Arcana card before he noticed another person standing in front of the full-body mirror in the room.

The man sported a white shirt and a black vest, his face unusually pale and his brown hair tousled, suggesting he had just woken up.

For some inexplicable reason, Lumian sensed a conflicting demeanor in this person—elusive yet restrained. The brown eyes held an indescribable weight, akin to staring into an abyss.

“Knight of Swords?” Lumian inquired.

The man nodded subtly and responded, “Seven of Wands, how may I assist you?”

Surprised, Lumian questioned, “How do you know I'm the Seven of Wands?” Lumian hadn't disclosed his exact code name in the letter, merely stating he sought help from the Knight of Swords as guided by Madam Magician.

The Knight of Swords spoke slowly, as if holding back something.

“Ma'am Hermit informed me that the Seven of Wands, affiliated with Madam Magician, would soon arrive in Feynapotter, possibly in need of intel or assistance.”

Madam Magician intentionally communicated with Ma'am Hermit about me, Lumian realized.

"I need your help locating two individuals in Port Santa and the surrounding seas. Try not to alert any factions."

"Be specific," the Knight of Swords replied, economical with his words.

Lumian shared Batna Comté and Nolfi's details, adding, "I'm not certain if they're still alive. They might have become corpses by now."

As he spoke, he handed two photo-like sketches to the Knight of Swords—a unique skill he'd acquired from Aurore's grimoires and his expertise in ritualistic magic. These images, directly replicated from his mind, bore an uncanny resemblance to photographs.

The ritualistic magic involved in creating such images demanded a suitable and secure target for prayer—a practice more common among official Beyonders who had orthodox gods to appeal to. Wild Beyonders rarely resorted to praying to dangerous entities for trivial matters. Being part of the Tarot Club, Lumian straddled both worlds, with the ability to seek aid from Mr. Fool or tap into Madam Magician's strength.

The Knight of Swords studied the photo-like sketches before affirming, "I'll help you find them as soon as possible."

There was no demand for payment or any immediate request, prompting Lumian to sigh.

Organizations do have their advantages!

Internal assistance often translated into favors, subtly binding individuals to reciprocal obligations. Some preferred setting clear prices rather than owing favors,

but Lumian didn't entertain such thoughts. Securing the Knight of Swords' presence and help was already a considerable favor in itself.

He pondered for a moment and then inquired, "What mission do you have in Feynapotter? Do you need my assistance?"

The Knight of Swords paused briefly before responding, "The matter in Feynapotter is wrapping up, but I'll be heading to the Southern Continent soon. I might require your help there."

"Sure thing," Lumian agreed.

Intrigued, he asked, "Is Ma'am Hermit also overseeing matters in the Southern Continent?"

Wasn't she too busy?

Madam Magician had indicated that this Major Arcana card holder primarily dealt with serelated affairs and a clandestine organization dedicated to the Hidden Sage, with little involvement in the Southern Continent.

The Knight of Swords replied in a subdued tone, "It's a personal matter, unrelated to Ma'am Hermit."

“Got it,” Lumian acknowledged. Many of his past tasks weren't orchestrated by Madam Magician, and even his mission in Port Santa to track down April Fool's key member was considered personal business if it didn't involve the Celestial Worthy.

After a two-second pause, the Knight of Swords added, “Moreover, I'm only temporarily under Ma'am Hermit's command.”

What does he mean by temporarily subordinate? Can one switch to other Major Arcana card holders in the future? Lumian wondered.

Without explanation, the Knight of Swords' form suddenly turned ethereal and disappeared.

Lumian, without activating his Spirit Vision, couldn't catch the departing figure in time.

It doesn't feel like teleportation or blending into the shadows... After a quick assessment, he changed into a brownish-green short-sleeved shirt and loose brownish-yellow pants commonly seen in Port Santa.

Exiting the master bedroom, Lumian tossed the Lie earring to Lugano.

“Go to Valerio and get the new IDs. Remember the face you used when you last saw him.”

“I remember it clearly.” Lugano took the Lie earring.

As Lugano was about to proceed with his disguise, Lumian halted him.

“Find a secluded spot after leaving the room to use it. When you return, shift back to your original appearance before entering the motel.”

Doesn't this mean I'll have this mystical item to myself for a while? Aren't you worried I might take off with it? It's not just unique; it's valuable! Lugano refrained from probing further. Following his employer's instructions, he took the Lie earring, a bag containing his disguise, and exited the room.

Observing Lugano's departure, Lumian picked up a golden straw hat and addressed Ludwig, “There's plenty of food in my bedroom. Stay put until I'm back.”

“Sure thing,” Ludwig agreed, seemingly eager.

Would someone exploit the absence of his guardians to attack him, the boy?

Lumian, passing by the sofa, casually placed the golden straw hat on Ludwig's head.

Simultaneously, he switched to a common round-rimmed felt hat and left the suite gradually.

He wasn't concerned about Ludwig being alone in the motel. In fact, those who might come into contact with the boy faced more significant risks.

Lumian adjusted his hat in the corridor and activated Shadow Transformation.

Swiftly, he transformed into a pure shadow, blending into the darkness at the base of the walls on both sides.

In the dark, veiled void, Lumian inhaled the scent of the gray amber perfume he had deliberately left on the Lie earring, using it to track Lugano.

His intent wasn't merely to determine whether the interpreter was problematic but to anticipate a potential attack.

With adventurer Louis Berry probing the sea prayer ritual and presenting himself as resolute and radical, it was likely the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village would swiftly react in a decisive manner, eliminating this outsider to dissuade others and factions from clandestinely stirring.

In this scenario, Lumian, Lugano, and Ludwig were at risk.

He specifically tasked Lugano to seek Valerio alone for the IDs, intending to see if Juan Oro and others had their eyes on his companions, seizing an opportunity to strike Lugano.

This strategy allowed Lumian to swiftly intervene if needed, rescuing Lugano while potentially neutralizing some Beyonders from the Fisheries Guild, showcasing the adventurer's strength and instilling confidence in onlookers, compelling further attempts.

However, the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village might not act immediately. They might feign vulnerability, luring hidden adversaries to reveal themselves before eliminating them in one fell swoop.

Lumian shadowed Lugano to Valerio's underground casino, observing him pay the remaining 50 gold risot for two local IDs.

No attack... Could it be the Fisheries Guild is fishing, or did they fail to recognize Lugano after he used the Lie earring? Lumian pondered the potential reasons while traversing through the shadows.

Lugano hurriedly avoided lingering on the streets, well aware that his employer had incurred the wrath of the Fisheries Guild. He feared being ambushed by those unwilling to target Lumian, dragged into an alley, and subjected to a brutal beating.

Seeking refuge in a crevice between two buildings near Solow Motel, he swiftly reverted to his altered appearance. Removing the Lie earring, he switched into his customary black formal suit, finally exhaling a sigh of relief. He turned onto Aquina Street and made his way back to the motel's entrance.

Several tramps lay dozing on both sides of the street, basking lazily in the sunlight.

Lumian was aware that unlike the severe tramp situation in the Loen Kingdom and the Intis Republic, Feynapotter's tramp issue was less acute due to fertile soil, ample pastures, and the Church's modified agricultural methods, resulting in surplus food production.

Here, food was notably cheaper, about 15 to 20% lower compared to Intis and other countries. Previously, before the Loen Kingdom began importing food from Feynapotter, the price of rye bread of the same weight was nearly twice as high.

Despite the abundance, bankrupt farmers, herders, and city dwellers ended up as tramps due to land acquisition, loan sharks, and other reasons. However, they received free food from various sources like the cathedral of Earth Mother, the Fertility Order, government departments, and charitable organizations, which although not filling, prevented starvation, allowing them to recuperate and find new opportunities.

As Lugano neared Solow Motel, Lumian, concealed in the shadows, sensed a disturbance.

Three tramps on the street abruptly stiffened, adjusting their postures unnaturally.

In an instant, they sprang to their feet like puppet marionettes, drawing revolvers in an odd manner and aiming at Lugano from three different angles.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Their white-eyed state left Lugano no room to evade as they pulled their triggers successively.

Chapter 555 Monster Illustrated

It wasn't until three tramps pointed revolvers at him that Lugano sprang into action.

As a seasoned bounty hunter, he had no time to discern where the assailants planned to shoot. He pushed off with strength in his feet, swiftly lunging to the side.

He dodged two bullets, but the third one was too close, altering his trajectory

—inevitably striking him.

In midair, Lugano did something unconventional.

Instead of curling up to shield vital spots, he extended his body, using his palm to shield his chest.

Bang!

The bullet connected with his right rib, unleashing a vivid spray of blood.

With a thud, Lugano landed on the street, rolling forward to evade subsequent shots.

In the midst of his lunge, Lumian's form materialized from the shadows by the roadside. He delivered a powerful punch to the tramp who had just fired.

With a resounding thud, the tramp's eyes rolled back, and he crumpled, unconscious.

Lumian returned to the shadows and swiftly moved behind another tramp. Before he could fire a second shot, Lumian punched him behind the ear.

As the tramp collapsed, Lugano skillfully evaded the second bullet fired by the remaining assailant.

In that tense moment, passersby and elderly women chatting on the street scattered, desperately seeking cover. The surroundings seemed eerily vacant.

Shadows danced as Lumian emerged from the darkness beside the last assailant. Extending his right palm, he seized the other's neck.

Almost simultaneously, the assailant's mouth opened naturally, emitting a slender black shadow.

An insect, as thick as a finger, with tentacle-like bristles floating on its body, lunged straight for Lumian's neck.

“Hmph!”

Two pale-white beams of light flickered in Lumian's nostrils. The slender, peculiar black insect lost its strength, gently descending into his raised left palm.

As anticipated... Lumian withdrew his right hand from the tramp's neck, unfazed.

The tramp's eyes returned to normal. Clutching his revolver, he staggered backward, leaning against the wall before slumping to the ground in a daze.

Lumian paid him no heed. Utilizing the shadows, he swiftly approached an unconscious tramp, noticing a small, bloodless wound on the back of his cervical spine.

Another slender, bristle-covered black insect darted out, attempting escape. Lumian's hand, engulfed in crimson flames, seized it. After a few struggles, the insect emitted a cooked fragrance.

Subsequently, Lumian employed a similar method to handle the strange black insect emerging from another tramp's body.

During this procedure, Lugano half-squatted on the street, his left palm flickering with a clear light as he pressed it against the gunshot wound on his right rib.

The charred wound immediately contracted, ceasing to ooze blood.

Drawing a dagger, Lugano skillfully "picked" a yellow bullet from the wound with precision and efficacy.

With that accomplished, he generated a faint light in his left palm, pressing it against the wound.

The injury squirmed and swiftly fused, reducing to a fifth of its original size in no time.

Lugano had intentionally stretched, hoping the bullet would hit a spot he could conveniently handle!

As he retrieved a bandage to tend to the remaining wound, Lumian approached, extending his free right palm.

Understanding his employer's gesture, Lugano returned the Lie earring, expressing relief, "Fortunately, I'm a Doctor. As long as I'm not killed on the spot, gunshot wounds aren't a big deal."

Silently, Lumian donned the silver Lie earring. Leaning down, he pressed and swiped at Lugano's wound, transferring it to the back of his right hand.

Due to the disparity in location and Lugano's pre-treatment, the wound regressed into a small scrape—one akin to scraping against a rough wall.

"..." Lugano stared at the wound that didn't even require a bandage, falling into a prolonged silence.

Lumian smiled and remarked, "Why else do you think I let you carry Lie?"

"..." Lugano gaped, uncertain of what to say.

Surveying the area, Lumian instructed, "Take the three tramps' guns and wait for the police to arrive. Report that you were attacked.

"After giving your statement, if there's nothing else, take Ludwig to the Fertility Order's entrance and have them uphold justice and maintain order in Port Santa."

"Alright, alright." Lugano hurriedly stood up.

Just as he took two steps toward the dazed tramp, realization struck. He turned around and blurted, "What about you? Where are you going?"

In his haste, he had forgotten to use honorifics.

Lumian simply chuckled, saying nothing.

I sent you to the Fertility Order to inform them of my intentions—to let them know!

Lumian proceeded towards Solow Motel, leaving crimson flames in his wake that incinerated the blood dripped by Lugano.

As he advanced, Lumian lowered his voice and asked, “Temiboros, do you recognize these insects?”

Termiboros remained silent.

Upon reaching the suite on the fifth floor, Lumian observed Ludwig eagerly awaiting him.

His heart stirred as he spread his left palm, revealing three black insects. Casually, he inquired, “Do you know what these are?”

Ludwig nodded obediently, speaking swiftly, “Batings Black Insect, a creature from Planet Heveen 3. Rich in various proteins and possessing high energy levels. They invade human bodies via the cervical spine, controlling their nervous systems to manipulate them to their advantage.

“These Batings Black Insects ceased evolving generations ago. While controlling the nervous system, the host's movements stiffen, and their eyes roll back.

“They seldom directly kill the host, but their larvae, once laid, absorb the host's energy, indirectly leading to their demise.

“In ancient times, many of their ancestors received boons. Though their descendants no longer possess these, their body structures adapted to the boon's power were inherited, eventually evolving into this special species with minor Beyond-level powers.

“Consider it a special spirit world creature or a degenerated Beyond creature.”

After the long explanation, Ludwig gazed at Lumian longingly, asking, “That's all I have to say. Can I eat them now?”

You really know... You make it sound so real. The Batings Black Insect, Planet Heveen 3. What's happening... The alien planets Aurore mentioned? Lumian was taken aback.

Lumian wasn't surprised that Ludwig had the desire to consume the Batings Black Insects.

This guy could even gnaw on live rats!

The insects even emitted a rather pleasant fragrance after being roasted.

Lumian stared at Ludwig for a few seconds before handing over the three Batings Black Insects in his hand.

Ludwig didn't hide his delight. He swiftly devoured two of the roasted insects, relishing the explosion of juices in his mouth.

He half-closed his eyes, and an unusual fluctuation seemed to surge within him.

Lumian furrowed his brow in confusion but refrained from intervening.

Having used the Mystery Prying Glasses to discover that there appeared to be something beneath Ludwig's skin, coupled with Ludwig's daily behavior and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom's stance, Lumian speculated that the boy was a monster in human guise, sealed by the Church to carry out tasks inconvenient for deploying clergymen.

Regarding the Reader pathway controlled by the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, it held various applications at the Body of Heart and Mind level. It was reasonable to assume why Ludwig's mind had suffered damage after being sealed, rendering him seemingly foolish.

After 20 to 30 seconds, Ludwig opened his eyes and rushed to the dining table. Grabbing a small steel table knife, he carefully placed the remaining Batings Black Insect on the tablecloth and skillfully cut it open, removing numerous black fascias.

Ludwig poured a glass of Manzan and arranged the fascia and the shell of the Batings Black Insect on the table, adding the black juice squeezed from the insect's body.

Lumian observed as the pale-golden liquor swiftly transformed into a dark-red, almost black hue, emitting dense bubbles.

Once the bubbles subsided, Ludwig lifted the peculiar cocktail.

Only then did he remember Lumian's presence. Stammering, he asked, “Can I—can I drink a little?”

A sealed Body of Heart and Mind indeed... Lumian smiled and sighed.

“Drink up.”

Gulp! Gulp! Ludwig finished the small amount of dark-red nearly black liquor and expressed satisfaction to Lumian, saying, “After concocting the Batings Black Insect's bodily fluids, it can enhance the physique of those who drink it for the first time to a certain extent. It grants everyone the ability to paralyze primate creatures within two hours. Yes, it will only be effective through contact.”

Th-this is turning the Batings Black Insect into something akin to charms? Moreover, it provides permanent effects and short-term Beyonder powers... Amidst Lumian's surprise, he sensed that Ludwig had undergone significant changes.

He had never demonstrated the ability to prepare such food before!

Lumian didn't delve deeper and calmly remarked, “Take Lugano to the Fertility Order's entrance later and ensure he informs Noelia about the attack.”

“Alright.” In a good mood, Ludwig readily agreed.

Meanwhile at the port district—while Ludwig and Lugano arrived at the Fertility Order.

Wearing a golden straw hat, Lumian strolled towards the square dominated by an Ocean Waves statue. His attention focused on the grayish-black house adorned with the Port Santa Fisheries Guild's sign.

The four- or five-story castle-like ancient structure was rumored to be over a millennium old, having been destroyed and rebuilt centuries ago.

Lumian's eyes traced the intricate symbols on the wall, which included iron hooks and fishing nets. Adjusting his straw hat, he proceeded towards the Fisheries Guild.

Chapter 556 Violent Beating

The encampment of the Fertility Order in Port Santa sprawled along the city's edge, nestled near the suburbs. It claimed an entire street, complete with fields, orchards, and a variety of livestock, providing a self-sufficient haven for the nuns when they weren't on missions.

Lugano gripped Ludwig's hand and raised his eyes to the green vines entwining the cloister's spire, with the Sacred Emblem of Life at its center. A simple depiction of a baby amidst wheat ears, flowers, spring water, and other symbols. Turning to Noelia, he uttered, "I was attacked. Just wrapped up my statement at the police station."

Noelia, adorned with a black hat adorned with white patterns, blending religion and combat, furrowed her brow and inquired, "Where's Louis Berry?"

Rather than delving into the specifics of Lugano's assault, she honed in on the whereabouts of Louis Berry, the great adventurer.

Lugano shook his head and replied earnestly, "I don't know. He told me to come here after giving my statement and inform you that I was attacked."

Noelia's expression shifted to solemnity.

In the bustling port district, standing before the robust grayish-black edifice of the Fisheries Guild, Lumian, now garbed in a white shirt, black vest, and brown pants, topped with a golden straw hat, casually strode to the building.

The two guards stationed here lacked guns, carrying only straight swords on their backs and daggers at their waists, blending in with the multitude of passersby.

"Who are you looking for?" Both guards extended their hands simultaneously, halting Lumian's advance.

Lumian couldn't "comprehend" Highlander. Without hesitation, he drew his revolver, pointed it towards the sky, and squeezed the trigger.

Amidst the gunshot's echo, he slipped between the two guards, entering the castle-like abode of the Fisheries Guild.

The guards exchanged uncertain glances but refrained from intervening.

One of them dashed towards the port's police station, while the other hurried into the grayish-black building, aiming to report to his superior and seek guidance.

Clutching his revolver, Lumian advanced at a measured pace. Beneath the puzzled stares of the staff, who hastily sidestepped, he traversed the hall and ascended the stairs leading to the committee member's office.

Just as he approached the second floor, a figure appeared before him.

Bronze-hued skin, broad and sturdy physique, black hair, and blue eyes characterized the young man who had aided the Fisheries Guild's president, Juan Oro.

He was Fernandez Oro, the old man's grandson.

Fernandez glared at Lumian ascending step by step, gritting his teeth.

“How dare you intrude into the guild!”

Lumian paid him no heed. He maintained a steady pace, neither hastening nor slowing as he approached the entrance to the second floor.

Fernandez masked his expression, his back slightly arched, and his eyes appeared to radiate an ominous glow.

Suddenly, Lumian sensed a significant dimming of the ambient light.

Simultaneously, an intangible force descended from above, entwining around his feet, making him feel shorter and causing his body to sway. Fernandez, in contrast, seemed to grow taller, casting dense shadows that engulfed the corridor's meager light.

Thud!

Advancing, Fernandez swung his right fist towards Lumian's head.

A gusty wind permeated the space, propelling the fist with hammer-like force, guided by an unseen magnet.

Lumian gazed upward as something within him erupted, shattering the binding force.

His thighs swelled suddenly, and his loose brown pants constricted. He grew taller seemingly out of thin air, sleeves and pants tightening around bulging muscles.

Bang!

A left punch from Lumian met Fernandez's incoming fist in a thunderous collision, causing the stairs to quiver and sway.

Fernandez, forced back two steps, bore no fear but a hint of joy on his face.

Retreating, his eyes darkened with a touch of brilliance.

Raising his left hand, a dark-green light swiftly concentrated on his unusually rough fingertips.

The light transformed into a ray, silently hurtling towards Lumian, momentarily immobilized by the collision.

Fernandez chose close combat from the start, creating an opening for the ray, capable of disrupting the human structure and inducing swift internal injuries.

The dark-green danger ray matched the speed of light. Lumian, unable to dodge in advance, could only watch as it struck between his chest and abdomen.

Yet, the dark-green ray pierced through, striking only an illusion.

Leveraging the Ascetic's accumulated strength in clashing with Fernandez, Lumian had seized the chance to arch his back and stand in place like an arc, deftly evading potential sneak attacks.

In this intricate dance, he even employed the Niese Face, creating an illusion of himself still standing upright!

Gradually, the dark-green ray dissipated, vanishing around the corner of the stairs.

Suddenly, a crimson fire, nearly white-hot, erupted from Lumian's body.

Transformed into a fireball, he hurtled towards Fernandez, who had just regained his footing.

Fernandez's pupils constricted, seemingly challenged by the blaze.

Swiftly, he sidestepped, clenched his right hand into a fist, and yanked it down.

An invisible force tugged Lumian to the ground, but undeterred, he dispersed the flames, reappearing with feet firmly planted on the corridor floor.

Clang!

His massive form stomped heavily, causing the building to sway. In a single stride, he stood before Fernandez, who had just risen. His left fist, wreathed in crimson, nearly white flames, collided with Fernandez.

Without a moment to activate his superpowers, Fernandez raised his arms hastily to block.

Boom!

Flames erupted as Lumian's punch sent the young man flying, crashing into the partially open side office, demolishing the wooden desk.

Capitalizing on Fernandez's disorientation and pain, Lumian followed, rushing into the office and delivering another punch with his left fist.

Boom! Crimson flames, nearly white, illuminated the room as the punch explosively struck Fernandez's chest.

The flames were contained by an unseen force, preventing them from entirely obliterating Fernandez's chest. Instead, they crumpled, clouding the target's vision.

Expressionless, Lumian halted, gazing at the semi-conscious Fernandez. He raised his left hand.

A colossal crimson fireball, nearly white, condensed rapidly, poised to act as a Reaper.

In the next instant, the fireball shot forth, homing in on Fernandez.

Abruptly, it ascended, passing the target, and collided with the wall behind the desk.

Boom!

Blazing white and red flames burst through the glass window, the wall, and ignited outside the Fisheries Guild building, creating fiery clouds in the air.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt as though he entered a dark and profound void. Distant, resplendent stars blinked like vigilant eyes.

Once more, he confronted Juan Oro, an elderly man with deeply etched wrinkles.

At that moment, Noelia had rushed to the square where the statue of the waves stood, shouting towards the building with a fallen window frame,

“Stop!”

At the sound of the combat nun's voice, Lumian sighed with regret, swiveled his revolver, and holstered it under his armpit. Juan Oro and the surrounding void vanished.

A few minutes later, Juan Oro emerged from the grayish-black building of the Fisheries Guild with his walking stick. In a deep voice, he addressed Noelia, “He attacked Fernandez. You must apprehend him!”

Noelia cast a cold glance at the president of the Fisheries Guild and retorted, “Should I then invite Fernandez to the police station to assist in the investigation of the Aquina Street shooting?”

“All of you, calm down and jointly maintain order in Port Santa. Otherwise, do you think the Church can't handle any of you?”

In the final words, the combat nun shifted her gaze to Lumian, issuing a warning as a gesture of fairness.

Juan Oro fell silent for a moment before stating, “I don't know anything about the Aquina Street shooting.”

With that, he turned and limped back to the Fisheries Guild with his cane, where many employees rushed to assist him.

Observing this, Noelia led her combat team to “escort” Lumian away.

Once out of the port district, the combat nun instructed her team members to slow down and create some distance, walking alongside Lumian herself.

“You're making things difficult for us. Order, understand? Superficial order must be maintained.” Noelia raised her hand, pinching both sides of her forehead.

“Fortunately, you didn't really kill Fernandez. Otherwise, I would have had no choice but to carry out the arrest.”

Lumian chuckled and remarked, “If I truly wanted to kill Fernandez, he wouldn't have survived until your intervention or Juan Oro's rescue.”

His words held undeniable truth.

Noelia was taken aback. After a few seconds of contemplation, she spoke, “Are you displaying your attitude, strength, and confidence for the onlookers? Simultaneously, do you wish for Juan Oro to misjudge your capabilities based on this encounter?”

Lumian remained silent. With a smile, he looked ahead and remarked, “Where did the former Governors of the Sea end up?”

Noelia fell silent for a moment before answering, “On the surface, they were dispatched to various locations. However, according to our observations, it takes at least four to five months, or no more than three years, for these Governors of the Sea to mysteriously vanish without a trace. There are often no signs of a struggle at the scene, and their families remain unharmed.”

Did they return to the sea voluntarily? Lumian smiled and said, "See, didn't I gain something from dealing with Fernandez just now?"

The Church of Earth Mother now seemed more willing to share information.

Noelia wasn't upset. She smiled and added, "No one reveals all their cards from the start. Once your investigation reaches a certain point, we'll provide more."

Lumian stared at the azure sea beside him, contemplating for a moment.

"You haven't disclosed the intentions of your Earth Mother Church in this matter."

Noelia's eyes flickered. Suddenly, she raised her hand and pointed at the arguing pedestrians ahead, shouting, "Street brawls are prohibited!"

Before completing her sentence, she sprinted over with her team, leaving Lumian alone.

Lumian scoffed and slowly shook his head.

Late at night, as Lumian was about to retire for the night, he heard the deep and hoarse voice of the Knight of Swords, as if suppressing something.

"Clues to the whereabouts of the two targets have been found."

Chapter 557 Purpose

Already? Lumian hadn't anticipated the Knight of Swords making progress this swiftly—in just a day.

Trusting his gut, he turned, meeting his reflection in the full-length mirror.

There stood the disheveled, pallid-faced Knight of Swords, a sudden appearance.

"Just clues?" Lumian mused, distilling the essence of the other's words.

The Knight of Swords shot him a gaze, tightly reined, and uttered, "The day after hitting Port Santa, they visited Balançat Ship Rental, asking about renting a boat for fishing. Vanished since."

Those words sparked a fleeting thought in Lumian's mind.

Quite romantic. As expected of a three-halves Intisian and half-

Feynapotterian duo. Opting for a fishing date!

If only Nolfi didn't carry the Maiden of the Sea's lineage and this wasn't Port Santa; then, romance might've been their motive. Regrettably, reality doesn't entertain "ifs." Lumian sighed, pondering Nolfi and Batna's true intentions.

Port Santa teemed with fishermen, yet not all owned boats. The lower-class ones either worked on vessels for a set pay or pooled funds to rent or buy. Balançat's profits came from these folks, not the tourists or middle-class sightseers. This wasn't a city known for tourism.

In Lumian's contemplation, the Knight of Swords pressed on, "Nolfi handled the price inquiry, but Batna cooperated without resistance."

Did Batna truly perceive it as a date? For Intisians, it holds allure. No wonder he didn't resist. Renting a boat for a sea excursion... Lumian pondered, his mind racing with possibilities. Was Nolfi planning to intercept the incoming Governor of the Sea during the sea prayer ritual or collide with their ship loaded with gunpowder? Perhaps she intended to replace them at a critical juncture? Lumian's thoughts whirred with conjectures.

Then, a sudden recollection jolted him.

Various sources mentioned a crucial detail about the sea prayer ritual: The final and pivotal part unfolded in a special sea area beyond the port. Details and the location were undisclosed to those who hadn't witnessed it.

A new hypothesis formed in Lumian's mind.

Nolfi's mother, a fleeing Maiden of the Sea, likely visited that special sea and might have shared pertinent information with her daughter.

Was Nolfi's motive for renting the boat to reach that unique sea area?

What lay there?

The core of the sea prayer ritual. Did this imply something, an entity, or power concealed in that zone? Was the ritual designed to harness something extraordinary?

Did Nolfi aim to seize the item and establish herself as the permanent Governor of the Sea? Or did she intend to obliterate it, terminating Port Santa's tradition of selecting the Governor and Maidens through the sea prayer ritual?

If obtaining the item were easy, the Fisheries Guild committee members would have done it long ago. Human nature tends to selfishness. Leaving a boon for the Maidens' children is improbable unless one stumbles upon a stroke of fortune and knows the right approach to secure, elude danger, and navigate the situation...

Destruction might indeed be the simpler route...

As his thoughts raced, Lumian looked up slightly.

Could April Fool's key members have orchestrated a prank to steal the item or its uniqueness?

Had they succeeded?

This was a pivotal question.

The Knight of Swords observed Lumian in silence, not disrupting his contemplation. He stood motionless, resembling a lifeless figure.

After a while, Lumian asked with curiosity, "How did you manage to trace Nolfi and Batna in just one day?"

The Knight of Swords, in a deep tone, responded, "Gathering information from the spirit world and conducting a field investigation. After their departure from the Balançat Ship Rental, all pertinent information was either concealed or eliminated, making it impossible to locate them again."

Isn't this the premise of certain divinations... Nolfi and Batna didn't take precautions against divination before visiting the ship rental company, but they did so afterward?

This doesn't add up. Either they never take precautions, or they do it consistently, unless they are both novices who only remember to guard against divination after inquiring about the boat's price...

Yes, a more plausible explanation is that ship rental falls within the fisheries and sea trade-related industries, deeply intertwined with the committee members of the Fisheries Guild. Nolfi and Batna, as outsiders, inquiring about the price of a ship rental attracted attention, and their identities were exposed, leading to their "disappearance"...

The note revealing that Nolfi is the child of the Maidens of the Sea might come from the owner or a shareholder of the Balançat Ship Rental? Lumian's thoughts gradually became clearer.

He gazed at the Knight of Swords, pondering how to request him to continue the investigation.

At that moment, the Knight of Swords took the initiative to say, "I'll delve deeper into the ship rental company."

"Thank you," Lumian expressed his gratitude sincerely.

Then, he witnessed the Knight of Swords's figure swiftly becoming transparent and vanishing.

Transformed into a soul-like entity? Wraith? Lumian discerned more details this time.

This led him to suspect that the Knight of Swords belonged to the temperance faction of the Church of The Fool. His subsequent journey to the Southern Continent was likely to deal with the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought.

Without hesitation, he shed his clothes, donned a faded cotton shirt, and reclined on the bed.

Late at night in Trier, Franca strolled beneath intermittently-lit street lamps, clad in a thick tweed shirt and pants that clung to her legs.

Even without makeup and deliberately concealing her appearance in the darkness and shadows, numerous inebriated individuals still approached her upon glimpsing her back or side profile, behaving like tiny flying insects circling under the gas street lamps on a summer's night.

Smack!

Franca's ponytail swayed slightly as she sent a particular drunkard flying with a sidekick.

The drunkard screamed and vomited on the ground.

Franca pursed her lips in disdain and muttered to herself, Pleasure sure brings trouble. It's manageable during the day, but some overconfident types try to flirt at night. And there's malice all around when I'm out. Even the hero who rescues a damsel in distress aims to strike up a conversation later...

However, those scoundrels came expecting joy and anticipation, only to receive a beating and the accompanying pain. Right, could this be considered a simplified version of pleasure causing affliction?

It was precisely because Franca wanted to experience this and potentially find an opportunity to digest the potion that she didn't sneak through the shadows and move undetected.

After a while, Franca slipped into the shadows and reached the empty room where she had previously met 007.

Her associate had mentioned that he'd discovered information about the ancient tomb beside the Crazy Mushroom Cave on the fourth level of the catacombs through the Church's resources and municipal archives. However, it wasn't safe to disclose it in the telegram group, no matter how close their bonds were. Therefore, he compiled the details and left them at the designated spot for Franca to retrieve.

Franca conducted a brief search and found two folded sheets of thin paper.

She unfolded them and swiftly skimmed the content. As an Assassin, even in the dimmest environment, she could decipher the words:

“The ancient tomb where you found the Mirror World Fragment belongs to a noble family from the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire.

“Their last name is Tamara. I haven't located specific details about the members in that tomb, but I've stumbled upon something odd.

“Not only does the fourth level house Tamara family tombs, but there are also tombs on the third level, such as the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb and the Impartial Tomb. Why aren't they grouped together...”

Franca's gaze froze.

Isn't the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb where Jenna completed her tearcatcher mission?

The mission they used as a pretext involved the Tamara family, and the tomb where they found the Mirror World Fragment belonged to them too!

Wasn't this an extraordinary coincidence?

Could it be a manifestation of mystical laws?

Franca collected herself and continued reading.

“...I can't access more detailed Tamara family information at my level. Figure something out yourself.”

Hmm... Franca nodded, resolved to report the entire situation to Madam Judgment, seeking insights and information from the Tarot Club.

In the early morning, on Aquina Street in Port Santa.

In a house diagonally opposite Solow Motel, Lumian, his appearance transformed, stood by a window in a room. Clutching the new ID provided by Valerio, he surveyed the suite where he, Lugano, and Ludwig were lodged, as well as the street below.

Now, he aimed to play the role of an ordinary bounty hunter who had taken on a confidential assignment, diligently monitoring the adventurer, Louis Berry.

Given Louis's assertive conduct in recent days, it was likely that all the well-

informed individuals in Port Santa knew of this great adventurer's desire to investigate the sea prayer ritual. The probability was high that Bard and other pivotal members of April Fool's would be in tow!

Chapter 558 Tamara Family

Lumian savored the tang of fermented grape juice bought from a street vendor as he coolly surveyed the suite rented by the adventurer, Louis Berry. He occasionally cast a discerning eye over Aquina Street, on the lookout for any potential monitors.

A little over half an hour ago, Lumian had transformed his appearance and changed into a different outfit. He had seemingly “teleported” to a nearby street before returning to secure a suitable room.

Soon enough, Lumian spotted Lugano cautiously heading out to fetch an extra breakfast for Ludwig. A chuckle escaped him.

This guy was still spooked from yesterday's attack.

However, unless the members of the Fisheries Guild had succumbed to the corrupting influence of superpowers, losing control of their emotions and rational thinking, it was improbable for them to target Lugano, the interpreter and guide. Louis Berry's response the previous day had sent a clear message to everyone:

If you can't take me out directly, keep your sights off those around me. You might eliminate me, but I, Louis Berry, can do the same. There'll come a time when your Fisheries Guild's committee members, your kids, and descendants travel without protection or lack strength. Wanna guess if I'd dare to make a move or if I have the capability?

Either find an opportunity to bring me down with all you've got, or play nice!

Faced with such a resolute “answer,” the rational committee members of the Fisheries Guild would know what to do. Louis Berry, the adventurer, wasn't bound by official rules like a Beyonder or a cop. Expecting him not to involve family in the game was unrealistic.

Moreover, considering his recent behavior and the circulating rumors, he was a daring adventurer, reminiscent of Gehrman Sparrow. Known for his aggression, madness, and coldness, there were no limits to what such a person might do.

Of course, Lumian wasn't letting his guard down entirely. Lugano would either have Ludwig's “company” in the future, or he'd be under Lumian's watchful eye at all times. After all, beyond the Fisheries Guild, many individuals in Port Santa were secretly plotting to exploit this opportunity for their own gain. Disguised as Fisheries Guild members, they could attack the interpreter and godson of the adventurer Louis Berry, intensifying the conflict and stirring up trouble prematurely.

Ignoring conspiracies at this level would be unacceptable for a Conspirer.

After Lugano returned to his suite on the fifth floor of Solow Motel with a heap of breakfast, Lumian purposefully avoided looking at the high-backed chair, seemingly adorned with a golden straw hat, positioned strategically at the dining table. He turned on his heel and exited the room, ready to explore the surroundings.

Stepping into the corridor, Lumian immediately spotted a burly man standing near the staircase, barely reaching 1.7 meters in height.

The man, with brown hair, brown eyes, and rugged skin, held a distinctive long mouth cigarette between his lips, fixing his gaze on Lumian.

In Highlander, the man inquired, “Who sent you here to keep an eye on Louis Berry?”

Lumian couldn't help but let out a soft chuckle.

“Are you not here to monitor Louis Berry yourself?”

“I didn't even inquire about your sender. Why the sudden curiosity?”

He responded in flawless Highlander as well.

The man, with the long mouth cigarette dangling, contemplated for a moment before nodding in agreement, making way for the stairs.

Lumian strolled past him, descending the staircase step by step.

As he departed, the man's gaze took on a gradually ominous edge.

He raised his left hand, delicately twisting the special long mouth cigarette.

Taking a deep breath, he exhaled into the cigarette, and in silence, a slender steel needle shot forth from the charred tobacco, aimed directly at Lumian's back, mere two meters away.

It was a blow dart, originating from certain tribes in the primitive forests of the Southern Continent. Typically, blow darts were one to two meters long, making them unsuitable for concealment or sneak attacks. However, bounty hunters, followers of the God of Steam and Machinery with strong hands, modified them into a more portable version—only slightly longer than regular cigarettes.

While this modification increased portability and its concealed nature, it sacrificed some power and limited its range to a mere four to five meters. When paired with specially crafted arrows carrying anesthetic and lethal toxins, it remained a favored tool among bounty hunters on both Northern and Southern Continents.

The man had concealed the blow dart within the long mouth cigarette, intending to lull the target and strike when the opportune moment arrived.

His objective: to subdue Lumian and extract information about the identity of his employer.

The steel needle flashed past, but Lumian seemed to have anticipated the attack. Just as the man blew air to propel the needle, Lumian swiftly bent forward, arched his spine, and dodged the blow dart in an almost inhuman contortion.

With a soft poof, the steel needle embedded itself into the wooden staircase.

In the next moment, the assailant's eyes widened as Lumian, in a display of flexibility surpassing human limits, swung a boxing glove.

Bang!

He fainted.

Swiftly recovering from his contorted evasion, Lumian bent down, scooped up the unconscious assailant, and dragged him into his rented room.

Taking advantage of the assailant's unconscious state, Lumian administered a dose of truth serum and calculated the time for him to regain consciousness.

Examining the unremarkable, ordinary face of his assailant, Lumian calmly listened to the panicked shout.

“I just wanted to incapacitate you and find a spot to interrogate you about your employer!

“The poison on the arrow is just an anesthetic!”

Squatting in front of the man, Lumian smiled and responded, “Now, let me ask you, who's your employer?”

“It's Juan Oro!” the brown-haired, brown-eyed man blurted out.

Lumian chuckled and probed further, “Is that so?”

“Yes, no, it's actually someone else...” At this point, horror overcame the man, and he fell silent.

Lumian prompted him patiently.

“Who is it?”

After struggling for a few seconds, the man involuntarily spoke,

“Rubió Paco.”

Rubió... Why is he keeping tabs on me? Does he seek to gain from the adventurer's activities? Is that why he didn't approach me discreetly to share information? Lumian nodded subtly and straightened up.

“Your breath stinks. Remember to brush your teeth more often.”

“...” The assailant looked perplexed, unable to fathom why the conversation had taken this turn. Nonetheless, he replied half-heartedly, “I'm not a fan of brushing my teeth.”

Lumian shook his head in disdain, uninterested in the blow dart as a trophy. Leaving the room, he left a parting message: “Make sure to lock the door behind me.”

In Trier, within Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Franca and Jenna's rented apartment.

They had already received Madam Judgment's response via Rabbit Chasel.

Before departing, Rabbit Chasel, adorned with a miniature top hat, shrunken gold-rimmed glasses, and a diminutive black trench coat, made an unusual request.

“Can I use a custom-made revolver as compensation for delivering the next five letters?”

Jenna's mouth hung open, momentarily taken aback.

“Sure.”

She questioned, “Why can't you conjure one yourself?”

Similar to your top hat, glasses, and trench coat.

“They have no practical use, but I hope the revolver does. The bullets need to be custom-made too,” Rabbit Chasel explained earnestly.

Jenna blinked and acquiesced.

Once the messenger departed, Franca commented with a peculiar expression,

“Why does it feel like it has shifted from pursuing knowledge to pursuing strength?”

Jenna wanted to defend Rabbit Chasel but struggled to find a compelling excuse. Instead, she cursed, “It's not necessarily a bad thing. It might even aid me in future battles!

“Moreover, the stronger the messenger, the safer the letter deliveries.”

Franca, lacking a messenger, suddenly felt a twinge of envy. Without delay, she unfolded Madam Judgment's reply.

“The Tamara family, one of the five noble families from the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire, held a hereditary duke aristocratic title, akin to the Amon you're familiar with, albeit slightly lower in status.

“In the era when the gods roamed the land, families capable of becoming great nobles undoubtedly possessed angelic powers. According to the information, the Tamara family had existed for many years before Alista Tudor became the Blood Emperor. They were renowned nobles from the previous empire.

“They had the coat of arms changed once and two internal divisions. This is why Tamara was buried on different levels of the catacombs at different times.

“Initially, their coat of arms consisted of thorns, a shieldwall, and vertical swords. Later, it became an open door, with the vertical sword acting as the crack.

“This represents a significant change in the Tamara family. It shifted from being dominated by the Justiciar pathway to being dominated by the Apprentice pathway. However, no corresponding historical information has appeared for the time being.

“A small number of members of the Tamara family, who adhere to the Judgment pathway, have survived to this day and are secretly active.

“The other Tamara group had established a close connection with the Demoness family during the Tudor Empire's era. During the Fifth Epoch, a secret organization known as the Theosophy Order emerged. It had Demoness figures and originated from Tamara's Apprentice pathway. There's reason to believe that they are still cooperating.

“This Tamara group has been estranged from the other one for many years, refusing to acknowledge each other.

“The Tamaras of the Judgment pathway also experienced a division. The exact situation is unknown...”

Upon reading this, Franca and Jenna shared the same thought.

The Tamara family is indeed connected to the Demonesses!

They continued reading the contents of the letter.

“The person who led you to the Tamara family's tomb and discovered the Mirror World Fragment is likely targeting that special mirror world and the Demoness Sect. Don't worry for the time being. Just be vigilant against coincidences, theft, and scams around you...”

In the ensuing days, Lumian, along with Lugano and Ludwig, remained unharmed.

Port Santa seemed to settle back into a semblance of normalcy. Those secretly observing displayed no indications of advancing further.

Just as Lumian contemplated taking further actions to elucidate all details before the sea prayer ritual in early November, the Knight of Swords brought fresh information regarding Nolfi and Batna.

His face maintaining a pale-white hue, he spoke to Lumian, “I've identified a suspect involved in the kidnapping of the two targets. Should I handle it alone, or shall we proceed together?”

Lumian took a moment to consider before responding, “Together.”

Chapter 559 Top-Notch Collaborator

After making his decision, Lumian had a chance to inquire, “Who's the suspect?”

“Lato Guiaro,” the Knight of Swords announced.

Lumian recognized this individual. He was also a committee member of the Fisheries Guild. Not only did he own shares in three large fishing boats and the Port Santa Fisheries Company, but he was also involved in shipbuilding, ice production, and other industries. Someone in his family had already married a Maiden of the Sea over a hundred years ago.

Lumian asked thoughtfully, “What's Lato Guiaro's connection to Balançat Ship Rental?”

“He's a creditor of the company and has arranged employment for many relatives there,” the Knight of Swords replied succinctly.

“It all adds up.” Lumian nodded in agreement and paused to reflect. “Let's convene at the crossroads of Saint Lana Street and Golden Wheat Street. How about meeting in three minutes?”

He had never set foot in Lato Guiaro's extended family estate, so he lacked the corresponding spirit world coordinates. His only teleportation option was Saint Lana Street, relatively close to their target. He needed to utilize Spirit World Traversal discreetly to evade any surveillance.

“Sure.” The Knight of Swords dissolved into transparency and disappeared instantly.

Lumian spent two minutes hydrating, donning a vest and a straw hat. Only then did the faint glow of the black mark on his right shoulder illuminate.

In an instant, his figure vanished from the shrouded room.

At the crossroads of Saint Lana Street and Golden Wheat Street, Lumian materialized from a concealed corner. The Knight of Swords, now sporting disheveled brown hair, a switched flaxen-colored shirt, and a dark brown vest, stood at the fringe of the crimson moonlight. His pallid face and oppressive eyes hinted at an underlying transformation, as if he could shed his human guise at any moment, revealing a monstrous form fueled by pent-

up desires.

While others might miss these subtleties, Lumian, being an Ascetic, possessed a heightened sensitivity to such situations.

The temperance faction, indeed... Lumian mused at the Knight of Swords's appearance, entertaining a whimsical thought.

Bro, ever considered embracing Inevitability? As an Alms Monk or an Ascetic, you'd spare yourself from enduring so much!

Of course, Lumian merely toyed with the idea and wouldn't actually propose it. Without the right strokes of luck, the boon of an evil god could gradually corrupt Beyonders within the potion system, eventually transforming them into humanoid monsters aligned with the evil deity. Nevertheless, his musings hinted at the potential synergy between specific Sequences of the boon system and potion system.

“Let's proceed.” As the Knight of Swords remained silent, Lumian took the lead and spoke.

The Knight of Swords nodded, and they followed the shadows along the street, turning into Golden Wheat Street at a measured pace, heading north.

Soon, they reached a five-story building resembling a small castle.

Observing the illuminated windows and grayish-blue outer walls, the Knight of Swords pointed at a specific glass pane, noting,

“That's Lato's bedroom. He and his wife sleep in separate rooms.”

The gathered intelligence is impressively detailed... Lumian acknowledged silently and inquired, “What's your plan?”

“Sneak in and take control of the target,” the Knight of Swords responded succinctly.

Isn't that a bit too straightforward and crude? The Guiaro family likely employs more than just ordinary Beyonders. Some members may have gained powers through the sea prayer ritual... Lumian recalled the unique characteristics of a Wraith and assessed his capabilities. With one hand in his pocket, he casually remarked, “Okay.”

With those words, his form dissolved into a shadow, seamlessly merging with the darkness.

Beside him, the Knight of Swords had already vanished.

Utilizing the shadows cast on the building's outer wall, Lumian deftly infiltrated Lato Guiaro's room.

In an instant, his target came into view.

A middle-aged man, with slightly curly black hair and dark brown eyes, adorned in a dark-blue cotton robe, greeted Lumian's sight. His long face featured a neatly trimmed thick beard.

Lato Guiaro's expression morphed into one of fear, and his body froze. He stumbled toward the shadow concealing Lumian.

In the reflection within each eye of the Fisheries Guild committee member, Lumian spotted the pale-faced Knight of Swords, clad in a dark brown vest and flaxen-colored shirt, with disheveled brown hair!

Observing Lato Guiaro losing control of his body, unable to utter a sound, Lumian stepped out of the shadow, returning to his original form.

An oppressive heaviness enveloped the air around him, akin to the weight of seawater.

Apart from this, nothing seemed amiss.

With a controlled step, Lumian approached Lato Guiaro, a sensation akin to moving through a swamp.

He refrained from resorting to the direct use of the Spell of Harrumph. Firstly, the other party seemed powerless and could be managed through alternative means, saving his spiritual energy. Secondly, Lumian hesitated due to uncertainty about whether the Spell of Harrumph would incapacitate both of them, given the forceful possession of Lato Guiaro by the Knight of Swords.

Retrieving a bottle of sedative from the Bliss Society, Lumian unscrewed the cap and brought it to Lato Guiaro's nose.

Fanning the opening with his hand to hasten the gas's flow, after about ten seconds, the committee member of the Fisheries Guild closed his eyes and slumped into unconsciousness.

Remarkably, he remained standing, not collapsing to the ground.

The Tarot Club's Minor Arcana card holder, the Knight of Swords, maintained absolute control over Lato Guiaro's body.

This is even simpler than employing teleportation and the Spell of Harrumph... I've faced numerous Beyonders before, but never have I subdued one without laying a hand on them. I strolled up casually, administering the sedative. A Wraith truly stands as an exceptional ally, capable of harmonizing with any Sequence of any pathway... Yes, a Wraith remains impervious to anesthetic gasses. The Bliss Society's sedative had no effect on him. As Lumian observed the noiseless resolution, he almost felt as if he hadn't partaken in the skirmish at all.

He returned the Bliss Society sedative to his concealed pocket and retrieved a canister of truth serum. Seizing the moment, he administered nearly a third of it to Lato Guiaro. Sensing that the sedative's impact might be short-lived on Beyonders with unknown traits like Lato Guiaro, he hastened to complete his preparations before the target regained consciousness.

Within 20 to 30 seconds, Lato Guiaro's eyes fluttered open.

First, he encountered Louis Berry, the adventurer in the golden straw hat, adorned with a faint smile. Subsequently, he discovered himself seated on a chair at some indeterminate moment, facing the divan in the bedroom.

Lato attempted to scream, but his vocal cords rebelled, rendering him motionless.

“Have you grasped your situation?” Lumian reclined on the sofa, placing his right foot on his left knee.

He spoke in Intisian.

Fear etched across Lato's face, rendering him unable to nod or respond.

While he possessed certain abilities, Lato was certain they wouldn't suffice against the adventurer Louis Berry. They would likely result in a renewed coma or a swift lightning strike.

“What do you want?” Lato suddenly inquired.

He, too, knew Intisian.

Attempting to raise his hand in surprise to touch his neck, he found himself immobilized.

Lato Guiaro lapsed into silence.

With a smile, Lumian responded, “I have a few questions for you. Answer them satisfactorily, and I might consider letting you live until tomorrow to assist me in spreading the word about this affair.”

Lato remained silent for a moment before consenting, “What do you want to know?”

Lumian casually shook his right ankle.

“Are Nolfi and Batna with you?”

“Yes,” Lato responded with a strong inclination to divulge information. “They're locked up in the basement. They're still alive. I just want to use them.”

“For what?” Lumian inquired, intrigued.

Lato's lips trembled as he explained, “I intend to use them to lead you to the location of the sea sacrificial ritual and guide you to rent a boat there.”

“So, you're the one who wrote that note...” Lumian exclaimed in realization. “How do you plan to guide me?”

Lato struggled to articulate his actions, but his mouth moved faster than his thoughts.

“I want you to discover that Nolfi and the Batna intend to rent a boat and head out to sea. Then, I'll arrange for them to seize an opportunity to escape and relay something to you, letting you know the significance of the sea area.”

“And then?” Lumian inquired with curiosity.

Lato sealed his lips shut but eventually spoke.

“What they will tell you is the truth, but they are unaware of one thing: “Never engage a Child of the Sea in a sea battle! Juan Oro awaits you in that sea region, ready to bury you entirely!”

So, the Fisheries Guild planted a deceptive trail through the clue about Nolfi, posing as a turncoat to lure me into a trap and eliminate me... If I hadn't swiftly revealed my intent to investigate the sea prayer ritual, exposing Nolfi and Batna to exploitation, they might already be sleeping with the fishes... The skirmish against Lugano was crafted to deceive me... As Lumian's thoughts raced, he heard Lato express confusion, “You haven't even started your investigation. How did you find me? You merely sent your interpreter to inquire about Nolfi and the others' whereabouts. There was no follow-up...”

Lumian's smile held a cryptic undertone as he disclosed, “Do you think I'm here alone to investigate the sea prayer ritual?”

“I represent the will of many. Numerous comrades lurk in the shadows of Port Santa.”

Lato felt a chill course through his stiffened body, lending credence to Lumian's words.

Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin.

“Where does your power come from?”

Lato's throat constricted as he answered, “From the sea. Each sea prayer ritual grants us strength.

“Unfortunately, the ritual failed last year. We received no replenishment for two years, and everyone weakened to varying degrees. Otherwise, Juan Oro would have finished you long ago. He would have cast your lifeless form into Wave Square, a stark warning to those who cross us!”

Similar to a boon? Theoretically, even without replenishment, a boon's power will gradually wane... Lumian pondered for a moment and remarked,

“The sea prayer ritual is a large-scale boon-seeking ritual, with the Governor of the Sea as the primary sacrifice?”

Lato contemplated for a moment before responding, “He serves as both sacrifice and host. Juan Oro and we act as assistant hosts.

“The sea prayer ritual is essentially a marriage to the sea and appeasing it. The boon is a byproduct.”

“Marriage to the sea?” Lumian suddenly found his imagination lacking.

Chapter 560 Traces

Lato rarely divulged details about the sea prayer ritual. He spoke with a weighty demeanor, “Yes, the Governor of the Sea ties the knot with the sea, quelling its violence and bringing peace. They truly become the spouse of the sea, commanding authority over this stretch of water.

“As the assistant and deputy hosts, we also gain varying degrees of in Port Santa receive some boons, although they are limited in number.”

So, the Governor of the Sea is synonymous with Husband of the Sea. The assistant and deputy hosts are like close friends or family busy assisting at a wedding, naturally earning gratitude. Those with the sea bloodline are akin to children attending a wedding, typically gaining some candy... Lumian attempted to comprehend Lato Guiaro's description of the sea prayer ritual by combining reality and wedding traditions in novels.

Intrigued, he inquired, “Does the Governor of the Sea engage in those acts with the sea?”

Aren't weddings supposed to conclude with newlyweds consummating their marriage?

“Of course!” Lato affirmed, “After the wedding, the sea will bind itself to the four Maidens of the Sea. Through their union with the Governor of the Sea, the first child of each Maiden of the Sea is a noble with a pure sea bloodline, possessing the strongest Beyonder powers.

“Why four and not one Maiden of the Sea? It's because individual humans can't endure the vastness, expansiveness, weight, and transcendence of the sea. Enough partners are needed to share the burden.”

The more I listen, the more ominous it becomes... Marrying a Maiden of the Sea is akin to marrying a remnant of the sea's power. It's no wonder they're highly valued, and their destinies change. The only challenge is acknowledging and loving their wife's first child. Lumian contemplated for a moment and remarked, “And the Governor of the Sea can withstand the passion of the sea?”

And it was four at a time.

Lato, devoid of pity or sympathy, stated, “One of the two most crucial purposes of the vigil ritual is to utilize the house and some of the sea spawn concealed within it to transform the Governor of the Sea's body, enabling them to withstand the violent and unrestrained sea.

“That's why the Governor of the Sea can only serve for a year. Even with the physical transformation, the power acquisition, and the Beyonder enhancement, they won't endure much longer.”

Consumable. The husband of the sea is a consumable... Lumian sighed inwardly and queried, “Then why would the Governor of the Sea return to the sea after leaving office?”

“No one knows the exact reason, but there's a certain conjecture. Juan Oro believes that the sea doesn't allow those who were once its husband to start a new life. And I believe that the modifications of the vigil ritual, the intrusion of spousal intercourse, and the influence of maritime authority make the Governor of the Sea more and more like a sea creature and less human. Eventually, he will inevitably return to the sea that gives him peace and comfort.” Lato felt that his deduction was correct.

What exactly is the sea you're referring to? Is it a natural spirit or a creature beyond, controlling the sea? Lumian replayed Lato Guiaro's answers in his mind before asking, "Sea spawn? Like the wrinkled monsters that can disguise themselves as devils, and the long black insects that control humans by burrowing into their necks?"

"Yes," Lato responded, yearning for a cigarette but unable to move his hands. "We, the Children of the Sea, are spawn of the sea. One of our duties is guiding certain sea spawn from the depths to settle on land using our Beyonder powers, helping them reproduce."

However, Ludwig mentioned that the Batings Black Insects originate from another planet, not some sea spawn... Lumian didn't rush to ask about the Children of the Sea's Beyonder powers; instead, he focused on the details of the sea prayer ritual.

"What's the other vital purpose of the vigil?"

Lato's expression hinted: "Don't you understand what weddings are about?"

"Well, there's the exchange of rings for marriage. And the vigil ritual modifies the Governor of the Sea's body, attaching a unique trait to a fixed golden ring, matching it to the sea bride's identity."

A unique golden ring... Lumian perked up and said, "And then?"

During last year's April Fool's prank, fringe members received orders to acquire a gold ring from Torres and conceal it within the lamb sacrifice's stomach!

"Then, following the completion of the other rituals, the Governor of the Sea will take the golden ring and cast it directly into the sea before the ship. He will utter in a unique language from the depths,

'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion!'

"If the sea consents to this union, gentle waves will stir, transforming into pure white foam petals that will shower over the four Maidens of the Sea.

"The returned ring carries symbolic weight, signifying authority over the waters surrounding Port Santa[1]."

Just the waters encompassing Port Santa? From the indications, it seems it's not the true sea, but rather something that affects this specific area of the waters... Lumian paused briefly before speaking, "How do you express 'We espouse thee, O sea...' in that peculiar language?"

Lato Guiaro contemplated for a moment before emitting a chattering sound.

Under the influence of the Language Comprehension charms, Lumian failed to grasp its meaning. He concluded it wasn't part of the Northern Continent's languages.

Simultaneously, he observed the Knight of Swords in Lato's eyes slightly shaking his head.

If the Knight of Swords truly belongs to the temperance faction that parted ways from the Rose School of Thought to align with the Church of The Fool, he should possess knowledge of the

Southern Continent's language. Additionally, with his high Sequence and extensive tenure as a Beyonder, he must have encountered most supernatural tongues. Does this imply it's not from the language family of the Southern Continent, let alone ancient Hermes, Dragonese, Elvish, or other mystical languages? Lumian regarded Lato Guiaro with an intrigued grin.

“Are you certain those words translate to 'We espouse thee, O sea...?'”

Lato hesitated briefly before explaining, “Probably. This is a language passed down from ancient times, existing since the sea prayer ritual. There are only a few sentences...”

He's not sure... They hadn't systematically mastered the language, only capable of uttering two or three sentences based on the legacy... Lumian sensed there might be more to it than Lato's description; there was no denial if the true meaning was akin to “Open Sesame.”

The folks from the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village might have been akin to the individuals Aurore and Franca spoke of. They employed a peculiar language, its true meaning eluding them as they substituted it with their own interpretation.

As Lumian pondered, his expression remained unchanged.

“Does the Governor of the Sea safeguard the ring after he acquires the special trait?”

“No,” Lato responded, shaking his head. “In addition to the Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea, and sailors in charge of controlling the ship, there are four pure-blooded Children of the Sea acting as deputy hosts. They guide the Governor and the Maidens through the ritual stages, teaching the unique call to marriage. The golden ring is held by one of the deputy hosts and only handed over to the Governor when needed.”

The Governor of the Sea doesn't have a chance to switch ritual rings... Suppressing his anxiety, Lumian continued at a measured pace, “Did the sea prayer ritual fail last year?”

Lato initially seemed taken aback, but then relief crossed his face.

“Did the imposter seek your help?”

“Yes, for some reason, the sea prayer ritual failed. The sea's rage claimed the lives of the Governor of the Sea and the four Children of the Sea serving as deputy hosts. Only the Maidens of the Sea and some sailors survived.”

The four deputy hosts are dead? Just as Lumian uncovered clues about April Fool's, he sensed the link had been abruptly severed.

The individuals with the best chance of substituting the ceremonial ring had all perished in the unsuccessful sea prayer ritual!

Lumian thought for a moment before inquiring, “What happened to the surviving Maidens of the Sea and sailors?”

“They're still alive, but under strict surveillance.” Realizing that the failure to last year's sea prayer ritual was exposed, Lato, not dwelling on the survivors' details,

continued, "We arranged marriages for the four Maidens of the Sea who lack actual sea powers with ordinary family members. Though it won't bring about a Beyond-level change, it has its benefits.

"The sailors, from Milo Village, received some benefits from Juan Oro but are restricted from leaving Milo Village until this year's sea prayer ritual succeeds."

Shifting gears, Lumian asked, "Did the sailors transport the sacrificial lambs and other offerings for the marriage to the sea to the deck?"

"Yes." Lato nodded. "Sailors handle such cumbersome and laborious tasks."

Within the ranks of sailors, one among Bard, Mad Lady, or Ultraman had sneaked in. If the other side held a stronger Beyond power or a mystical item from the Marauder pathway, they could snatch the genuine ceremonial ring during the exchange, swapping it with a counterfeit... It wouldn't be a surprise that the Marauder pathway, influenced by the Celestial Worthy, has key April Fool's members wielding matching strengths or artifacts... Lumian swiftly suspected this.

He turned to Lato Guiaro, keeping his tone composed.

"Tell me about the four Maidens of the Sea and the survivors from last year among the sailors."

Lato recounted the details from memory.

Having absorbed the specifics about the potential targets, Lumian inquired further, "Were all participants in the sea sacrificial part thoroughly checked?"

"Absolutely. No unauthorized items allowed onboard to maintain the ritual's integrity. And before the ship reaches its destination, Juan Oro will vigilantly oversee using his powers," Lato elaborated.

As anticipated, Lumian nodded subtly.

"What powers does Juan Oro wield?"