

Inevitability 571

Chapter 571 Key Details

The Governor of the Sea's residence hall opened into a labyrinth of rooms, its scarcity of windows allowing only a trickle of light despite the crimson moon's glow. The dimness cast a cloak of silence over the place.

Even as the deputy host, clutching the coveted Ring of the Sea Queen, moved with caution, the floor still betrayed him with a faint echo.

Lumian observed him heading towards the basement staircase, a sudden realization dawning upon him.

Once in the basement, the deputy host could effortlessly switch the authentic Ring of the Sea Queen with a crafted counterfeit without alerting anyone.

The other deputies were occupied in the hall, and the Governor of the Sea, undergoing physical modifications, had the Maidens of the Sea by his side. The sea spawn were scattered elsewhere.

Frowning, Lumian shot a sidelong glance at another deputy host. He lowered his voice and addressed Jorge, the form Juan Oro had taken, in Intisian.

“Every year, during the vigil ritual, does a deputy host send the Ring of the Sea Queen alone to the basement, retrieving it an hour later?”

He stressed the word “alone.”

Juan Oro nodded subtly.

“Yes. There's no need for extra protection in this building...”

But just as Juan Oro was about to continue, he halted abruptly.

This presented a golden opportunity to swap the Ring of the Sea Queen unnoticed.

The fact that external enemies couldn't breach the building didn't mean the deputy hosts within were without their own problems!

Lumian wasted no time and turned to Juan Oro, uttering, “Should I follow, or will you take charge?”

Juan Oro regarded the matter gravely, rising from his seat and responding, “I'll go.”

Harnessing his abilities, he steadied himself and swiftly caught up with the deputy host. In a deep tone, he stated, “Let's go together. I want to seize the chance to pay my respects to my ancestors.”

The other deputy host raised no objections.

As Lumian observed the two lighting their lanterns and descending into the basement, his mind instinctively filled in the upcoming sequence.

Place the Ring of the Sea Queen on the decrepit stone platform... Offer prayers to the ancestors... Return to the surface... Re-enter and retrieve it an hour later...

During that hour, the Ring of the Sea Queen sits unguarded in the basement, vulnerable to any opportunistic interference... If someone had concealed themselves there beforehand, swapping the genuine ring for a counterfeit would be a straightforward task...

Certainly, infiltrating and concealing oneself in this location is no simple feat. I can't even do it; I could last a mere two minutes before being detected by the sea spawn...

The Ring of the Sea Queen has to be positioned on that worn stone platform. Any deviations—deviations...

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian suddenly recalled the transformations in the Lie earring when it rested on the weathered stone platform in the basement.

The Seer pathway item had activated a pattern embodying an Apprentice and a Marauder, granting it the ability to siphon someone's power that lasted half a month!

Lie could accomplish this feat, but what about the Ring of the Sea Queen?

Though not an item of the Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder pathway, it had been meticulously crafted based on a ritual passed down by an Amon. Perhaps, over time, it could activate the unique characteristics of the basement, gradually assimilating with thieving qualities.

Yes! Considering that the essence of the sea sacrificial ritual involves extracting power from the seal at the bottom of the sea and claiming it, the Ring of the Sea Queen, being a key item, should not only be capable of loosening the seal to a certain extent but also possess the power-stealing ability. It could distribute the gains among various participants in the ritual—

the host receiving the most, followed by the Maidens of the Sea as assistant hosts, and the deputy hosts and sailors gaining some within the ritual's range, provided they possessed similar powers!

In essence, Juan Oro and his companions' understanding of the ring-making ritual is incomplete. The “paying homage to the ancestors” segment is integral and crucial. Without honoring the ancestors, the sea sacrificial ritual would merely open the seal without stealing the accumulated power. Instead, it would erupt and disperse... Lumian had just marveled at the mysticism's terrifying complexity when a sudden alarm gripped him.

He realized he had overlooked a pivotal detail.

According to Madam Magician's interpretation of the Ring of the Sea Queen's functions and her speculations about the essence of the entire sea prayer ritual, the substitution of the genuine Ring of the Sea Queen with the fake ring customized by April Fool's in Torres should have prevented the catastrophic phenomenon of the sea's fury consuming the Governor of the Sea, all the deputy hosts, and some sailors in the subsequent ritual!

The fake ring hadn't undergone the initial ring-making ritual, leaving its patterns, symbols, and structure devoid of the necessary mysticism characteristics. Even if the Governor of the Sea recited the prescribed words, he couldn't infuse energy into it to open the seal!

As a complete counterfeit, it shouldn't have triggered any phenomena. However, due to its incapacity to extract the amassed power, the sea area would experience more shipwrecks, and the weather would deteriorate.

To align with the events of the previous year, the fake ring thrown by the Governor of the Sea had to complete the first part of the ring-making ritual. Still, without being placed in the basement to honor the ancestor, it could only partially open the seal, unable to extract and monopolize the gathered power. This incomplete process led to a sudden eruption, causing the sea to “rage”!

Lumian's eyes narrowed slightly. As a Conspirer, he had seized the core of the matter.

Two Rings of the Sea Queen were on the ship, but both were fakes.

The ring brought by the deputy host to the ritual ship was also a forgery. In fact, the authentic Ring of the Sea Queen hadn't made an appearance during last year's sea prayer ritual!

The genuine Ring of the Sea Queen, which had undergone the entire ring-making ritual as per the Fisheries Guild's knowledge, hadn't been placed on the stone platform in the basement to fulfill the ritual of honoring the ancestors. Consequently, it was also a sham—a counterfeit ring lacking the most crucial effect!

The deputy host who had taken the Ring of the Sea Queen into the basement and retrieved it last year might also be part of the problem!

The peripheral members affiliated with April Fool's weren't considered trustworthy. Their actions likely didn't disrupt the overall plan. The fake ring concealed in the lamb's stomach and the Bard's performance likely served as preparations for subsequent investigations, camouflaging vital clues. As Lumian's thoughts raced, Juan Oro and the deputy host returned to the hall.

“It's on the stone platform,” whispered the president of the Fisheries Guild, masquerading as Jorge, to Lumian.

Lumian refocused his attention and casually inquired, “Who was responsible for sending the Ring of the Sea Queen to the basement last year?”

“I don't know. Without any special arrangements, anyone can do it. The four deputy hosts in the hall last year died in the sea's rage when the ritual failed.” Juan Oro, sensing Lumian's suspicion, clarified.

Dead? Unlikely... Lumian lacked the corresponding item for spirit channeling and didn't have time to search for it. All he could do was ask, “Which one of them was familiar with the ring-making ritual and knows the details of the Ring of the Sea Queen?”

“None of them; it was their first time serving as deputy hosts.” Juan Oro shook his head. “Besides, as I said, those who know these secrets are still alive.”

If the deputy host wasn't Ultraman... Then who was it? Lumian's mind raced as he arrived at a conclusion.

It was Mad Lady!

Similar to Bard, she utilized the same technique to alter her appearance. With Ultraman's assistance, she assumed the guise of a deputy host, completing the final step in creating the Ring of the Sea Queen. Then, she boarded the ceremonial ship with it.

Lumian had been puzzled by how Mad Lady could locate the special sea and rescue Bard accurately and in time. Now, he had the answer.

Mad Lady was present on the ceremonial ship, right beside Bard. There was no need for coordinated locations or timing!

Initially suspecting Mad Lady to collaborate with Bard, Lumian now realized that Bard worked with Mad Lady, providing assistance in case of unexpected developments and shouldering the responsibility of misleading investigations.

Dammit, Faceless abilities are so annoying. April Fool's is so annoying! Lumian's emotions fluctuated as he struggled to contain his emotions as he cursed. Relying on his Ascetic trait, he restrained himself from erupting.

More importantly, while he had unraveled the issues with the sea prayer ritual from last year, the identities of Ultraman and the forthcoming plans of April Fool's remained elusive.

The night passed in silence.

On an out-of-fashion sailboat in the harbor, Charname, sporting a short, round-rimmed felt hat, emerged from the cabin and approached Nolfi, who stood at the edge of the deck. Charname inquired, "Can we enter those special waters if we set off now?"

Nolfi nodded, responding, "Yes, the stars will align in a specific pattern after midnight."

Following Lumian's instructions, she and Batna had rented a boat for a few days from other ports along the same coastline.

Charname chuckled, saying, "Then let's set off!"

Observing the surprised and puzzled expressions of Nolfi and Batna, he explained, "If we follow the Governor of the Sea's ceremonial ship, we'll undoubtedly be discovered by the Fisheries Guild. Setting off an hour or two later would be meaningless. Therefore, we'll go ahead of time and hide there, patiently waiting for an opportunity!"

Although Nolfi didn't understand the nature of the opportunity Charname referred to, she didn't inquire. She responded with anticipation, "Okay."

Charname then turned to Batna.

"Are you joining us? It will be very dangerous."

Batna's expression fluctuated. After more than ten seconds, he declared, "I'm going!"

Charname clicked his tongue but remained silent.

At that moment, Nolfi frowned, glancing at other parts of the deck, and asked, "What about the sailors here? We can't leave the sea without them, and they can't handle too much danger."

Charname chuckled.

"Don't worry, we have sailors who can handle danger."

As soon as he finished speaking, he half-turned, raising his right hand to the third level of the cabin. He clasped his index finger and thumb into a ring and extended his other three fingers.

Soon, the captain, first mate, second mate, and all the sailors emerged, their eyes tightly shut. Like sleepwalkers, they lined up and walked down the gangway toward the docks.

Batna and Nolfi's eyes froze, as if trapped in a terrifying dream.

Chapter 572 The Real Target

Under the crimson moonlight, the crew members stumbled towards the dock like the living dead, moving towards the various buildings concealed in the darkness.

In seven to eight minutes, their figures vanished from different spots.

Immediately after, Nolfi and Batna observed pitch-black shapes emerging at the edge of the cabin, and eerie pale-white or dark-green flames igniting across the deck.

Figures crawled out of the pitch-black flames.

Some wore tattered clothes, and their skin visibly rotted. Others were white bones with fragments of flesh hanging from them. Pale-white flames protruded from their eye sockets.

These were all corpses!

Soon, a half-rotted corpse in a dirty jacket hoisted the sail. The corpse with a missing breastbone stowed the heavy anchor. The other corpses took their positions, steering the sailboat slowly away from the port.

As they gazed at the decaying flesh, pale-white bones, and sinister flames of different hues, Batna and Nolfi felt as if they had stepped into a novel world.

Horror novels! Ghostly tales!

“Navigator, it's time for you to work.” Charname's voice snapped Nolfi back to reality.

In the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Lumian leaned against the statue-less wall, surveying the other deputy hosts in the hall, including Juan Oro.

Uncertain if any of them were genuine, they could easily be impersonated by a Faceless.

In the upcoming operation, the only person he could unequivocally trust was himself.

An hour passed in an indescribable silence. This time, Lumian took the initiative, leading Juan Oro into the basement to retrieve the Ring of the Sea Queen, completing the “paying homage to the ancestors” segment.

The ring rested on the dilapidated stone platform, untouched. Lumian couldn't be certain if it was authentic, but the patterns, symbols, and structure seemed intact, and no one had lurked in the basement after inspection.

Maintaining his calm demeanor and a tense heart, Lumian patiently waited until 6 a.m., feeling both mental and physical fatigue dissipate.

Two hours later, the current Governor of the Sea, Simon, exited the vigil room with four Maidens of the Sea and approached the building's door.

Lumian, Juan Oro, and the other deputy hosts promptly stood up and followed.

The two-story sailboat, adorned with colorful flowers, docked at the Milo Village's docks. Villagers acted as guards, blocking anyone daring to approach.

Ascending the gangway to the deck, Lumian sensed an invisible gaze from every window, flower, and mast—a familiar feeling from when the statues in the Governor of the Sea's residence came to life.

He calmly navigated through the gazes, adhering to Juan Oro's instructions to stand at the left edge of the deck.

This was the designated spot for him, the deputy host named Brian.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

On the dock of Milo Village, vibrant paper fragments burst forth from ceremonial cannons, creating a colorful display.

Amid the festive atmosphere, the ship set sail gradually. It circled Port Santa, capturing the cheers and blessings of the people before venturing toward the distant sea.

As the navigator, Juan Oro guided the ship into a boundless azure sea with no discernible landmarks. They weaved between left and right turns, occasionally reversing direction.

Nearly an hour passed, and beneath the clear, bright sky, dense fog suddenly enveloped the ship.

Splash!

Within the fog's depths, waves surged like mountains. Any ship it touched would capsize or shatter.

The Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea, some sailors, and the two deputy hosts, participating in the sea sacrificial segment for the first time, were terror-stricken by the ominous scene, their faces paling.

For Juan Oro, a veteran of many sea sacrifices, it seemed like he was observing a child's plaything. He directed the sailors with no emotional fluctuations, guiding the ship along the only safe sea route through the thick fog and exaggerated waves.

After an unknown duration, the fog lifted, and the tidal waves miraculously subsided. An ocean resembling sapphires unfolded before Lumian's eyes.

The sea appeared limitless, but the distance and sky were gray, with only a hint of sunlight seeping through.

Port Santa, Solow Motel.

Lugano stood by the window, observing as the citizens formed celebratory teams, weaving through streets and alleys, spreading their joy.

Having already taken Ludwig to witness the Governor of the Sea's colorful flower boat ritual and participated in two spontaneous citizen-led celebrations, Lugano returned to the suite as teatime approached. There, he provided Ludwig with food he had purchased and prepared in advance.

I could still head out later. When the Governor of the Sea returns, another wave of celebrations will ensue. Unfortunately, I can't engage with the enthusiastic Feynapotter girls with such a child in tow... Lugano thought regretfully.

At that moment, a knock echoed on the door.

"Who is it?" Lugano, a seasoned bounty hunter, heightened his guard.

"It's me." A gentle voice emanated from outside the door.

Lugano recognized her as Rubi3 Paco's wife, Madame Giorgia.

She's here to see the boss? Has something happened to the Paco family again? Lugano glanced at Ludwig, who was eating earnestly, and quickly walked to the door and opened it.

Giorgia, not clad in her usual glamorous attire, wore a black dress akin to that of an old widowed matriarch.

Her long, disheveled brown hair was in disarray, and her thick azure eyes betrayed an unmistakable fear and panic.

"Where's Monsieur Louis Berry?" the lady inquired.

"He's participating in various celebrations for the sea prayer ritual," Lugano fabricated an excuse.

He observed the distressed Madame Giorgia and instinctively inquired with concern, "Did something happen?"

"H-h..." Giorgia stammered, panic and fear evident in her eyes. "I discovered the true identity of that humanoid lizard!"

That humanoid lizard? The one the boss killed? Amidst Lugano's confusion, Giorgia suddenly threw herself into his arms.

The fragrance permeated Lugano's senses, momentarily hindering him from immediately pushing the madam away.

Giorgia suppressed her voice but couldn't conceal her fear.

"That humanoid lizard was my husband, Rubi3 Paco!"

"Huh?" Lugano was both surprised and bewildered.

Giorgia gritted her teeth and explained, "The one you guys saw, it's fake!"

Fake? Someone impersonated Rubi3 Paco, and the real Rubi3 Paco had transformed into a humanoid lizard, killed by the boss? As this realization struck Lugano, his thoughts suddenly slowed down. The surroundings seemed coated in a glass-like layer.

He instinctively struggled, but Giorgia held him tightly, interrupting him with various subtle actions.

Ludwig, engrossed in devouring a skewer of roasted octopuses at the dining table, appeared oblivious to the unfolding silent drama at the door.

In a suite diagonally across the corridor, Rubi6 Paco sat quietly in a recliner, wearing a faint smile. He had orchestrated the humanoid lizard incident and hired Louis Berry to resolve it intentionally. Firstly, he aimed to confirm the other party's identity. Secondly, he wanted to leave a vulnerability in the Paco family's handling of weak monsters, ensuring others wouldn't suspect a Faceless's involvement to confuse the target.

However, he abandoned the plan to deal with Louis Berry and refrained from triggering the corresponding trap.

This decision wasn't due to uncertainty about the target's identity; the Mysteries aura on Lumian Lee's chest couldn't escape his notice. He was unlike others. Instead, he had a new plan.

The overall April Fool's operation might not align with Loki's personal objectives!

His current focus shifted to the young boy, Ludwig.

To him, a sealed demigod-level powerhouse was a gift from the Celestial Worthy!

No ritualistic target could be more suitable.

Hence, he hinted at the sea anomaly, simultaneously confusing Lumian Lee and allowing him to connect the concepts of sealing and theft, understanding what occurred during last year's prank. He took the initiative to board the ship and head to the sea sacrifice grounds, enticing this formidable opponent away while another force restrained him.

Now, he was ready to execute a grand performance, captivating the attention of numerous Port Santa citizens!

The calm, gem-like sea held no waves. The four Maidens of the Sea engaged in a brief sacrificial dance, while sailors carried offerings—lambs, roosters, ox heads, and more—from the cabin, stacking them at the bow.

With the Ring of the Sea Queen in hand, Juan Oro approached the Governor of the Sea, awaiting the groom's gift for the proposed marriage.

Lumian, vigilant of everyone present, scanned his surroundings.

Any one of them could suddenly reveal themselves as Bard, Mad Lady, Ultraman, Loki, Hisoka, or a marionette.

The gentle, rhythmic dance concluded swiftly. Juan Oro produced the peculiar golden ring, passing it to the incumbent Governor of the Sea, Simon Guiaro.

At that moment, a person emerged openly from the cabin.

A woman in a black nun's uniform and matching hat, her expression calm yet tinged with sadness.

The surrounding sailors paid her no heed, as if she were invisible.

Seeing this, Lumian's pupils dilated, then constricted.

It was the source of Derangement!

The humanoid Sealed Artifact lost by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!

In an instant, Lumian comprehended two things.

The Death Navigators, transformed Governors of the Sea, had coincidentally appeared near the Flying Bird, stirring colossal waves.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact had unconsciously set out to sea, coincidentally choosing the same destination as him—Port Santa.

There was a purpose behind this!

Chapter 573 Bard

The woman in the black nun's attire felt Lumian's gaze, turning her head slightly and locking eyes with him.

Lumian's gaze met hers, filled with indescribable colors, and the figure in his line of sight vanished.

Simultaneously, Lumian recognized the insignificance of this occurrence. It didn't warrant further consideration.

Beside the incumbent Governor of the Sea, Juan Oro noticed the once calm azure sea undulating. In the gray sky, stars barely visible to the naked eye underwent changes, stirring an inexplicable throbbing and emotional shift within him.

An anomaly? Juan Oro couldn't determine if it was good or bad. Given the circumstances, any change was treated as an accident, potentially caused by a hidden enemy.

Without hesitation, he forcefully thrust the Ring of the Sea Queen into the hands of the incoming Governor of the Sea, Simon, growling, "Hurry up and marry the sea!"

In a moment of desperation, the president of the Fisheries Guild unintentionally failed to alter his voice to sound like Jorge. However, his vocal cords had changed, making him sound younger than usual.

Simon, taken aback by the shout, didn't notice Juan Oro's voice shift.

He raised his hand, clutching the Ring of the Sea Queen, and recited, "I espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion!" With that, he threw the unique golden ring. It trembled with light, its surface covered in a gentle glow.

As the Ring of the Sea Queen submerged, its glow intensified and expanded to the size of a baby before transforming into a cone of light, vanishing into the azure seawater.

In the next moment, Juan Oro, Lumian, and the rest heard a deafening boom.

Splash!

The sea boiled, unleashing huge waves that catapulted the colorful flower boat into the air. A destructive aura echoed in the surroundings.

Wh... The sea's fury! How could this happen? Juan Oro's pupils dilated in disbelief. He couldn't fathom that they had angered the sea again. It seemed like this year's sea prayer ritual had failed once more.

He had meticulously followed every step, witnessing the placement of the Ring of the Sea Queen on the dilapidated stone platform representing the ancestors. He personally retrieved and guarded it with utmost vigilance. Everything went smoothly!

How could this be?

As the bridal boat teetered on the verge of capsizing, Juan Oro clenched his fists, and crystalline scales resembling starlight manifested on his body.

His eyes darkened, resembling resplendent stars emerging within.

He melded with the “sea.”

The crashing sound abruptly ceased, and the majestic, terrifying azure waves froze in midair, as if held tightly by an unseen hand.

In Milo Village, within the cathedral-like Governor of the Sea's building.

The imposter Governor of the Sea, Miguel, lay in the servant's room. Suddenly, he sat up and leisurely rose from the bed, a self-satisfied smile playing on his face.

Standing before a glass window overlooking the weeds outside, he muttered to himself, It's almost time...

I wonder how Juan Oro will react when he discovers the sea sacrifice has failed again. Heh heh, this is payback for all the 'care' he's given me over the past year.

What's Loki up to? Why the sudden deviation from the original plan? Isn't he concerned about potential accidents?

Miguel—a key member of April Fool's, Bard—had previously disguised himself as the sailor, Iru, and boarded the ship, escaping with Mad Lady when he jumped into the sea.

Their plan over the course of the past year was devised last year. They had selected locals from Port Santa who resembled the unfortunate governor. After disrupting the sea sacrifice and returning ashore, they promptly killed one of their targets, allowing Bard to assume the guise.

Their confidence in Miguel—disguised by Bard—becoming the false Governor of the Sea stemmed from Ultraman taking charge of the matter.

To prevent potential rebellion from peripheral April Fool's members, Bard, a former Swindler, intentionally wrote Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles and handed them to Loki. The latter discreetly distributed them in Trier, creating the illusion of Bard's activity in Intis. This tactic prevented others from connecting Miguel—obediently residing in the Governor of the Sea's residence—to Bard.

Writing about Emperor Roselle's romantic past indeed amused Bard, and witnessing Juan Oro's reactions, including the lashing with a crutch before intimate encounters with his granddaughter and the wives and daughters of relevant personnel, greatly satisfied Bard's mischievous tendencies.

However, pranks were secondary. Bard's main objective in assuming the disguise of the Governor of the Sea was clear:

He gained unrestricted access to the basement of the building, believed by Milo Village's inhabitants to be the sacrificial ground for their ancestors!

Despite being a fake Governor of the Sea under the watchful eyes of sea spawn in the house, he had free rein everywhere except the ring-making ritual grounds and the vigil room. Only those two areas were off-limits unless he crossed a line. Moreover, Ultraman confirmed that the basement of the Governor's residence held no value for the sea spawn. Except for two symbolic guards at the staircase, there were no monitors or protectors inside.

Villagers of Milo Village only visited occasionally, showing respect for the Governor of the Sea by not entering or leaving the building without permission.

This provided ample opportunities for Bard, the imposter Governor of the Sea.

Thinking about the expressions of Juan Oro and Lumian Lee when they witnessed the sea prayer ritual's failure again, Bard couldn't help but chuckle. He muttered in a mocking tone, You know the sea sacrifice, ring-making, and vigil happen once a year. Haven't you considered that the ancestral sacrificial ritual can only occur annually?

That dilapidated altar requires the slow accumulation of worshippers' spirituality. It takes almost twelve months to gather the necessary enchantment.

Over half a month before the basement gained serious attention, he had strategically placed an item related to one of the three pathways on the altar, openly siphoning the accumulated theft powers!

With this plan, Bard believed that, regardless of the success of the previous night's ring-making ritual, regardless of how closely Juan Oro and Lumian Lee guarded against the replacement of the Ring of the Sea Queen, it wouldn't possess the ability to steal power from the sea bottom.

Hence, the sea prayer ritual was destined to fail. The seal would further open, and the long-accumulated "volcano" inside would erupt!

Anyone attempting to stop it would perish!

Last year, the reason April Fool's took the risk of making Mad Lady a deputy host and deliberately replacing the Ring of the Sea Queen on the sacrificial ancestor's stone platform with another item arose because the theory that the high-level stealing power could only be used once a year wasn't entirely confirmed. Although Ultraman could analyze and experiment in the basement, he refrained from doing so too frequently to avoid suspicion.

Following the sea prayer ritual failure last year and the subsequent monthly experiments over the past eleven months, Bard, Ultraman, and Mad Lady were now certain that they didn't need to go through the trouble of replacing the real Ring of the Sea Queen. Instead, they could preemptively take away the theft power. Thus, they sneered at Lumian Lee's efforts, unconcerned about his actions or the need for destructive measures to avoid detection by the Earth Mother Church.

Despite their confidence, they still had to maintain appearances, including seeking help from Lumian Lee.

Bard shifted his gaze, averting it to his left hand.

There were signs of a ring being worn there.

This was, in fact, the item carrying the key functions of the Ring of the Sea Queen!

Port Santa, Solow Motel, at the entrance of the fifth-floor suite.

“Hugging” Madame Giorgia, Lugano's thoughts faltered, as if the iron gears were covered in yellow rust or lacking lubricant.

W-what's... going on?

Am I... under attack?

No... I have to hurry... I have to... get rid... of this state...

Lugano attempted to push away the woman in his arms, only to realize she had become surprisingly heavy. Using her joints subtly, Madame Giorgia prevented him from raising his arms and legs. The movements resembled a lovers' playful interaction.

Coupled with his disjointed thoughts, even a Planter like Lugano couldn't break free from Giorgia's restraints.

Panicking, Lugano opened his mouth, about to call for help.

Just then, Giorgia lifted her head, pressing her red lips against his.

Lugano was momentarily taken aback.

In the adjacent room, Jenna, disguised as a female mercenary, held a mirror to “reflect” the situation in Lumian's living room through the glass and other items.

Seeing Lugano and Giorgia embracing and flirting, Jenna couldn't help but curse under her breath, “Dammit, can you even go into heat at a time like this? And in front of a child!”

Considering that Franca would be joined by members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian tasked Jenna with secretly monitoring Lugano to figure out what was wrong with the interpreter.

As a former Showy Diva, Jenna had witnessed similar scenes and even more restrictive ones. She couldn't fathom why they chose to display such affection at the door.

At that moment, Anthony Reid, standing beside her, looked at the mirror and frowned.

“It doesn't seem like they're making out. Their actions and expressions aren't typical of people engaged in such activities.”

Chapter 574 Heavy

Their actions and expressions don't align with the typical behavior of people engaged in intimate moments?

Though Jenna had witnessed such scenes in the past, she hadn't delved into the intricacies of others' intimate interactions. Upon hearing Anthony's words, she promptly sided with the Spectator's perspective.

Anthony continued, “Lugano's body language indicates clear resistance. His current condition is highly abnormal.”

Resisting, yet not breaking free... There's a lack of intense movements, even though Lugano is a Sequence 8 Beyonder with a strengthened physique. This situation is undeniably peculiar... What

kind of Beyonder powers could cause this? Jenna swiftly sifted through the information about potential adversaries for this mission.

Most of it had been compiled by Franca, with a small section supplemented by Judgment and Madam Magician.

As these thoughts raced through Jenna's mind, a realization quickly dawned on her: Marionettist!

A Sequence 5 Marionettist from the Seer pathway!

According to Franca's description of Marionettists, these Beyonders could lurk in the shadows, silently transforming their targets into autonomous marionettes from a distance.

And Madam Magician's additional information included this: "A Marionettist manipulates a creature's Spirit Body Threads. A skilled Marionettist can establish initial control of the target's Spirit Body Threads in five to 10 seconds, slowing down thoughts, movements, and stiffening the body."

Lugano's current state perfectly matched the characteristics of a Marionettist's initial control over the Spirit Body Threads!

Jenna lowered her voice and said to Anthony, "Loki..."

The enemy with the codename Loki was none other than a Marionettist!

Anthony immediately grasped Jenna's conjecture and nodded affirmatively.

"No need to rush. It takes a Marionettist several minutes to completely transform the target into a marionette. We have a chance to rescue Lugano."

As per the information, forcibly taking Lugano away, pushing him beyond a certain limit, or triggering him could help him break free from the Spirit Body Threads or enhance his resistance to such manipulation.

Certainly, the most direct approach would be to locate Loki's true form and launch a direct attack on the enemy, preventing him from concentrating on controlling Lugano's Spirit Body Threads.

Jenna caught Anthony's implication.

Don't hurry to rescue Lugano. Find Loki's true form while Loki hasn't detected us!

The two of them had posed as a couple and checked into Solow Motel's suite the previous night.

Once Loki was identified, dealing with a peculiar, insidious adversary with formidable abilities might be beyond their capacity. However, they could create a significant disturbance and "report" to the Fertility Order, responsible for local Beyonder matters. Lumian had already coordinated with Noelia in advance.

Jenna nodded and reached for the fluorescent powder, preparing to conceal herself.

But in the next moment, she abandoned the idea.

She recalled the information's warning: Marionettists can directly perceive the Spirit Body Threads of different creatures. Most invisibility effects wouldn't work on them.

Moreover, Loki was currently manipulating Spirit Body Threads.

How to locate Loki? Jenna pondered with a strong sense of urgency.

In the sealed waters, aboard the betrothal ship.

Lumian first witnessed the mountain-like azure waves surging, only to realize that they had frozen in the air, as if subjected to a sudden freeze. The surroundings emitted a violent aura, obliterating everything in its path.

The sea's fury? Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

Similarly, he couldn't fathom what had gone awry. It seemed that the Ring of the Sea Queen had only unlocked the first half of the seal and hadn't manifested the second half of its stealing effect.

Nevertheless, following the completion of the ring-making ritual, the ring was indeed placed on the dilapidated stone platform. Lumian and Juan Oro had retrieved it together.

Previously uncertain if the Ring of the Sea Queen had been swapped, Lumian now knew it hadn't. This was evident as the Ring of the Sea Queen had further opened the seal. A counterfeit ring, lacking the previous ritual, wouldn't exhibit a similar function.

Could it be that someone moved the Ring of the Sea Queen during the hour in the basement, preventing it from completing the eroding power's duration? Or perhaps the critical stone platform in the basement was destroyed in advance, hindering the completion of the ancestral ritual?

Unlikely. How could the first scenario elude the attention of Juan Oro, me, and the sea spawn surveillance? The second scenario shouldn't be inconspicuous. It would undoubtedly be discovered by the sea spawn... As Lumian's thoughts raced, he suddenly felt a slight erosion from the destructive aura surrounding him.

His mind instantly connected to something.

Vaguely, Lumian "saw" the dark-blue seabed, nearly pitch-black. He "saw" a peculiar object partially embedded in rocks and gravel.

The object was unnaturally massive, surpassing the Fertility Order's cloister and the Governor of the Sea's residence combined. It bore a silver-gray hue, with sleek lines resembling a colossal spindle missing its front segment. At that moment, the side of the object gleamed with a radiant starlight. Together, they appeared to form a circular, transparent door.

Through the door, Lumian "saw" a particular scene inside.

Silver-gray metal walls were densely covered with special holes, resembling hives.

In some nests, black foam bubbled as thin, bristle-covered Batings Black Insects crawled out. Some nests contained more than ten compartments, with a wrinkled Little Devil lying inside, seemingly deceased and disintegrating into various forms...

As this peculiar and horrifying scene etched into Lumian's mind, he snapped out of his stupor. He couldn't be bothered to ponder April Fool's actions. He swiftly deliberated on how to prevent the sealed object from going berserk and breaking free entirely.

The extracted power has yet to cause any harm...

It appears to be suppressed by Juan Oro at the expense of his life...

If I can seize this window of opportunity to steal the released power and distribute it to everyone with a sea bloodline, there's a chance of completing the sea sacrifice segment and allowing the sea prayer ritual to succeed...

Stealing...

In an instant, Lumian contemplated two solutions:

Firstly, he could immediately seek help from Mr. Fool, an expert in this area, with Termiboros as a precedent. Secondly, he could utilize the Lie earring, a mystical item that had gained the ability to steal others' powers on the stone platform meant to honor the ancestors.

Lumian swiftly discarded the first option, considering April Fool's involvement. With The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings backing them, seeking Mr. Fool's assistance might not yield a response. It could potentially be a time-consuming effort.

As for the second method, Lumian sensed a strong feeling of inevitability and an undeniable sense of coincidence.

Lie had recently acquired the ability to steal someone else's power—and here it was proving beneficial in a critical moment!

Without the luxury of time for careful analysis, Lumian made a swift decision.

Put aside coincidences and inevitability for now. Resolving the current predicament was the most pragmatic approach!

He then retrieved the silver Lie earring from his pocket.

Typically, such items couldn't be brought onto the betrothal ship—they would surely be discovered by the sea spawn. However, this time, Juan Oro had communicated with the sea spawn in advance, stating that he and his assistant intended to pose as deputy hosts and board the ship to guard against any potential mishaps.

The sea spawn placed their trust in the president of the Fisheries Guild more than anyone else while the traitors were still at large. Their intelligence wasn't particularly high, and they were especially protective of the sea prayer ritual.

Clutching the Lie earring, Lumian extended his spirituality.

He immediately perceived the surrounding starlight and sensed their presence.

Lumian subconsciously extended his hand and twisted his wrist.

A plethora of starlight cascaded down, rushing toward the Lie earring and enveloping him.

At that moment, a person materialized in front of him. She wore a black nun's uniform, her face expressing profound sorrow.

She appeared like a colossal whale suddenly leaping out of the sea without warning.

It's her? The source of Derangement? Lumian finally recollected something he had forgotten.

There was indeed such a person on the ship!

In the next instant, he sensed the humanoid Sealed Artifact becoming unusually weighty, so heavy that the surrounding void slightly bent. It was so heavy that all the starlight surged toward her like

the sea. The weight was so immense that the betrothal ship began to sink, and the nearby seawater was pushed aside.

Silently, Lumian witnessed the sea around him morphing into a translucent azure mountain peak, looming over them as they descended to the seabed. It resembled the walls of a deep well, and the well mouth, formed by these walls, grew more distant with each passing moment.

Four hours ago, at the edge of the foggy sea, Nolfi said to Charname, "You have to listen to me completely from now on. Otherwise, it will be very dangerous."

"Sure." Charname nodded. "But before that, we need to communicate openly."

A smile gradually spread across his face.

Batna, who stood beside Nolfi, asked curiously, "What communication?"

Charname produced a metal canister and looked at Nolfi.

"This is an agent that can make people speak the truth. I want to know if you have a secret collaborator. If so, who is it? Don't worry, it's not poison."

Charname unscrewed the lid and took a sip to demonstrate his sincerity.

Nolfi fell silent.

"If I don't understand the corresponding details, it'll be challenging for me to follow your instructions," Charname began to instigate. "We're already here. We could enter those waters at any moment and destroy the underwater palace before the sea prayer ritual. Are you truly willing to give up?"

Nolfi remained silent for a moment before accepting the metal canister and taking a big gulp.

Charname's heart ached as he withdrew the bottle and patiently waited for the medicine to take effect.

Chapter 575 "Handover"

After a while, Charname reached his limit. He stared at Nolfi and questioned, "Do you have any secret collaborators?"

Nolfi gently nodded and admitted, "Yes."

Batna and Charname anticipated this response, but it failed to dampen Charname's excitement.

"Who is it?"

Nolfi hesitated for a moment before revealing, "It's, it's Juan Oro!"

Juan Oro? The president of the Fisheries Guild? Batna was caught off guard.

Charname shared the sentiment.

Could the spy be the boss? Despite his critique, he pressed on, "Are you sure it's Juan Oro?"

While instructing Juan Oro to investigate the core members of the Fisheries Guild, Lumian, who had uncovered the Earth Mother Church's true motives, sought similar information from Noelia of the Fertility Order, which included Juan Oro, the president.

Official reports indicated that Juan Oro's health had been relatively stable. He had never faced serious illness or severe injury. Moreover, he hadn't displayed any signs of losing control of his lizard form.

In essence, there was no indication that he had been possessed by Ultraman, a transmigrator.

Naturally, a definitive judgment couldn't be made based solely on this information. After all, when the original bodies of many Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members met unfortunate fates, there were no witnesses.

Despite growing older, Juan Oro's personality remained relatively unchanged, sans the increasingly stubborn streak and a penchant for returning to the sea.

Crucially, if Juan Oro were Ultraman, many of April Fool's disruptive actions during the sea prayer ritual would be unnecessary. It could be executed in a simpler and more covert manner.

Considering these factors, Charname had previously concluded that Juan Oro wasn't a key member of April Fool's.

Nolfi pursed her lips and disclosed, "It's him. I met him six months ago in Port Rayak."

Rayak, located north of the Dariège mountain range, served as a port under the jurisdiction of the Riston Province in the Intis Republic.

"Met before?" Charname blurted out. "Your eyes can deceive you. What you perceive doesn't necessarily reflect reality."

Unable to hold back his desire to confide, he continued, "Just like now. The me you see isn't equivalent to the real me. The difference is quite significant."

"Are you suggesting that the Juan Oro I encountered was an imposter?" Nolfi expressed disbelief. "But, he also demonstrated the ability to control the waves!"

Charname chuckled.

"Many Fisheries Guild committee members possess such abilities. What if one of them impersonated Juan Oro?"

"But, but it's too similar..." Nolfi fell into self-doubt.

Charname spoke casually, "Based on the intel we gathered, Juan Oro hasn't left Port Santa for nearly a decade.

"He's the president of the Fisheries Guild. He frequents the association daily."

While this information was used to persuade Nolfi, it wasn't conclusive evidence. If Juan Oro were Ultraman, he could have enlisted Mad Lady's help to travel to Port Rayak and return in less than two hours.

Under such circumstances, hardly anyone would notice his brief absence.

Nolfi fell silent, pondering, and muttered, “Then, then who could it be?”

“How would I know?” Charname expressed his criticism.

Appearing slightly awkward, he shifted the conversation.

“What kind of collaboration did the imposter Juan Oro seek with you? Do you have any means to obliterate the underwater palace and put an end to the sea prayer ritual once and for all?”

Nolfi's body quivered, as if grappling with an innate urge.

After a brief pause, she struggled in response, “H-he'll help me cover my tracks and disregard my existence. He'll permit me to board a ship and infiltrate the sea sacrifice waters ahead of the Governor of the Sea's vessel and conceal myself.

“Then, as the Governor of the Sea unveils the Ring of the Sea Queen and utters the words of the marriage proposal, I'll deliver a line.

“My mother imparted that passage to me. It originated from her profound connection with the palace when she received the sea's blessing. Its—its purpose is to trigger a self-destruct sequence within the palace.”

Nolfi's words flowed more effortlessly, signifying that she had given up on resisting.

“Self-destruction sequence? Are you certain? Do you comprehend that language from God knows where?” Charname wore an expression of skepticism.

“That's what my mother told me.” Nolfi conveyed her lack of understanding of the language's meaning.

Charname pressed on, “Does your mother comprehend that language?”

“She doesn't, but she grasps its significance. Can you fathom it? It's a form of spiritual communication,” Nolfi defended her mother with determination.

“Deceiving through soul-level communication isn't out of the realm of possibility. Moreover, it's always simpler to dupe the illiterate,” Charname muttered his internal grievances once again.

He furrowed his brow and inquired, “Did the imposter Juan Oro inform you that the sea prayer ritual failed last year?”

“No. If he had, I wouldn't have chartered a boat at Port Santa,” Nolfi expressed her frustration on the matter.

Had she known from the beginning that last year's sea prayer ritual had faltered, she would have anticipated heightened vigilance at Port Santa this year. Those attempting to rent a boat for a sea journey would undoubtedly be on a watch list.

Charname wore a perplexed expression.

“Wouldn't that mean the imposter Juan Oro was expecting you to be apprehended by Lato Guiaro...”

Half a year ago, neither April Fool's nor anyone with ulterior motives in Port Santa had foreseen Lumian's arrival to investigate the sea prayer ritual. This suggested that Nolfi's original role wasn't designed to lure Lumian. It might have been part of April Fool's initial plan until they reconsidered, opting to exploit the great adventurer's investigations.

Under such circumstances, letting Nolfi be captured by Lato Guiaro was evidently not a mere oversight in April Fool's plan, unless that was their intention all along.

Is Nolfi being thrown into the mix to confuse the Fisheries Guild and sow suspicion among other committee members against Juan Oro? A rift between them would hinder their cooperation. But this strategy doesn't seem cunning enough...

Is it an attempt to divert the Earth Mother Church's attention from this year's sea prayer ritual and redirect it towards Nolfi?

Or... or...

Franca, posing as Charname, had a guess.

Or perhaps, Lato Guiaro is a member of April Fool's!

The moment Nolfi arrived at Port Santa and tried to rent a boat, she was apprehended. Not only does Lato Guiaro hold complete sway over this “collaborator,” but he also offers corresponding protection... Could it be that when the sea prayer ritual is on the brink of commencing, he will feign a lapse in vigilance, allowing Nolfi to escape successfully and secure a boat?

With this speculation in mind, the more Franca considered Lato Guiaro, the more something felt awry.

Whether it was the intel provided by the Knight of Swords or information from the authorities, a consistent message emerged:

Lato Guiaro had slept in separate rooms from his wife many years ago!

For transmigrators, after taking over the original owner's body, their greatest apprehension was being exposed by those around them through various details. Among these people, the ones most likely to unveil their disguises were their deeply connected parents and spouses who shared the same bed. In particular, the latter were privy to many interaction habits unknown to others. In such circumstances, opting to sleep in separate rooms was evidently a form of self-protection for transmigrators.

Initially, Franca had a fleeting suspicion when she came across this information, but she promptly dismissed it. Firstly, it wasn't uncommon for a middle-aged man and his wife to have separate sleeping quarters. Lato Guiaro wasn't the sole Fisheries Guild committee member to adopt this practice. Secondly, Lato Guiaro had previously been forcibly controlled by the Knight of Swords and Lumian before being subjected to truth serum. During subsequent questioning, he displayed no indications of ties to April Fool's. He didn't even betray any signs of stifling laughter when discussing marrying the sea!

However, what if Lato Guiaro, who willingly transmitted Nolfi's information, had prepped in advance to elude the adventurer's detection and had cloaked a portion of his memories through Hypnosis?

The truth serum fundamentally heightened the inclination to share with others. Anything beyond the user's knowledge or comprehension remained veiled.

The pressing question now was: where did Lato Guiaro acquire Beyonders or items with similar capabilities through April Fool's channels?

Franca, increasingly convinced that Lato Guiaro was Ultraman, recalled a crucial detail: the current Governor of the Sea, Simon, belonged to the Guiaro family!

Previously, Juan Oro had heeded her advice to conduct a blood test on everyone, excluding Lumian, who boarded the ship. The aim was to confirm familial ties and unveil any outsiders attempting to infiltrate in disguise.

What if Simon Guiaro was Lato Guiaro in disguise?

This method would only affirm his identity!

On the betrothal ship, now resting on the seabed as if weighed down by a colossal boulder, Simon Guiaro, positioned at the bow, appeared bewildered, his face a mixture of panic and confusion.

Yet, a faint curl formed at the corners of his mouth.

At that moment, the Governor of the Sea handover ritual from the previous night flashed in his mind.

Clad in a pristine blue suit, Simon Guiaro entered the hall, noting his predecessor, Governor of the Sea Miguel, clad in a retro white robe, observing him. Following the predetermined procedure, he uttered the prearranged words.

"I'll leave the sea to you."

"It's my honor," Simon Guiaro responded solemnly as he advanced toward the other party.

Miguel extended his right hand, and Simon Guiaro reached out for a handshake. This gesture symbolized the departure of the former Governor of the Sea and the commencement of Simon Guiaro's role as the present Governor of the Sea.

After the handshake, they passed each other by. As they turned their gazes in opposite directions, the corners of their lips subtly curled upwards.

Under the scrutiny of the numerous statues surrounding them, one advanced while the other exited the hall.

Having transformed into Simon through a Seer pathway's Sealed Artifact, Lato Guiaro observed the illusory starlight surrounding them, akin to seawater caught in a vortex. It cascaded down, forming a massive funnel.

The origin of this vortex was the humanoid Sealed Artifact they had “abducted” from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!

After the exposure of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's internal affairs and the consecutive deaths of Loki and I Know Someone, one resurrected at the cost of a precious opportunity, while the other met a permanent end. They adjusted their initial sea sacrifice plan and activated a backup strategy to counter potential interference from the Research Society.

According to the revived Loki's warning, Hela, the society's vice president, had likely ascended to Sequence 4, reaching demigod status, and switched from the Death pathway to the Evernight pathway. Depending solely on Ultraman, Bard, and Mad Lady, their intricate plans would crumble before absolute strength.

Of course, they were confident if it were just Hela alone. Confidence wavered when considering President Gandalf, an enigma, and the other vice presidents, alongside the troublesome society members. Dealing with them now seemed an insurmountable challenge.

Starlight surged, revealing a sorrowful woman in black nun's attire to everyone on the ship. Her presence felt magnetic, as if attempting to absorb everything around her.

It was akin to an unusually heavy iron ball falling from the center of a taut fishing net, dragging objects down and pulling the surrounding net with it. In these circumstances, previously still items naturally slipped away.

The most impacted was Juan Oro, with a potent sea bloodline and formidable sea power. Resisting the sea's fury, he felt a spatial inversion, as if his front and back had switched to up and down. Like a lost person above an abyss, he involuntarily “fell” to the bottom at an accelerated speed, where the woman in black nun's attire awaited.

The deputy hosts, apart from Lumian, felt an unseen force tugging at them. Struggling, they staggered towards the humanoid Sealed Artifact. The sea's power within them wavered, propelling them to the surface, revealing sparkling starry scales that hinted at losing control.

The Maidens of the Sea and the sailors on the ship struggled against the terrifying suction force, swaying on the spot. Some experienced their skin smoothing, others felt scales emerging in their flesh, and a few shifted their feet intermittently.

Lumian, though relatively unscathed, exerted considerable strength to resist the relentless pull.

As an Ascetic, he vaguely sensed the river of fate for everyone present surging toward the humanoid Sealed Artifact. Future tributaries narrowed and converged, leading inevitably to one possibility—death.

In that moment, Lumian grasped why the humanoid Sealed Artifact could use words to curse someone to death.

Lato Guiaro reached out, gripping the shipboard to resist the invisible pull from the woman.

His gaze scanned the people on the ship, then returned to the sea's depths.

The ship descended, surrounded by a translucent wall of azure seawater. Sea creatures swam within, seemingly oblivious to the anomaly. In the distance, the spindle-shaped silver-gray object at the sea bottom, its tip embedded in rocks, came into view.

Lato Guiaro suppressed any sign of a smile.

He was nearing his destination.

The fools from the Fisheries Guild and the oblivious Earth Mother Church might never comprehend what lay sealed at the bottom of the sea here.

It wasn't a so-called "palace" but a spaceship!

A spacecraft that infiltrated during the Fourth Epoch!

It boasted a sci-fi dimension, housing advanced technology entwined with mystical Beyonder elements, forming the core of the entire spaceship.

A locator, a petri dish, a breeding box, a key component of a Stargate—a place where a Beyonder object slumbered.

The Ring of the Sea Queen, crafted by the sea spawn, served as the spacecraft's key. Only when the external seal weakened annually could it activate the spacecraft's internal power, merging the two to crack the core seal!

Lato Guiaro's gaze grew greedier as he stared at the faintly discernible silver-gray behemoth.

His aim extended beyond temporary authority—to become the true Governor of the Sea and the spaceship's owner.

This would grant him immense power and the ability to accomplish unimaginable feats using the spaceship.

The azure sea, tinged with a hint of green, encircled the ship as if respectfully escorting them into the palace of the sea.

Seeing the sea's fury interrupted by the woman's sudden appearance, making her the most perilous element, Juan Oro wasted no time deepening his connection with the sea.

At that moment, he temporarily became the Governor of the Sea.

He resisted the terrifying suction force.

Abruptly, the humanoid Sealed Artifact "departed" from the ship, entering an empty darkness.

Resplendent stars flickered above, below, and to her left. Ahead stood Juan Oro, covered in starlight scales, deep-eyed, and with completely white hair.

Juan Oro raised his right hand, swiping his finger.

The "stars" plummeted with fiery tails, stirring up waves.

On the betrothal ship, everyone lost the momentum to rush to the same place. However, the power they used to resist the pull couldn't be withdrawn, causing them to fall in the opposite direction.

Lato Guiaro feigned a similar state, crashing into the bow of the ship.

Seeing the silver-gray behemoth approaching, his heart leaped with joy. He was about to recite a phrase he didn't comprehend but understood its purpose.

It was a coded order to completely open the spaceship's door and establish an energy passageway, allowing him to enter under protection!

April Fool's had been established for several years. Lato Guiaro's decision to target the sea prayer ritual last year was influenced by the resolution of other voices from the Governor of the Sea, Maidens of the Sea, and certain sea spawn. This allowed them to understand the significance of the three crucial passages.

"I espouse thee, O sea..." was one of the passages, its true meaning being to inject energy into the created key and enter a password. Lato Guiaro was about to recite the second paragraph, which served as an order to initiate the spaceship.

Initially, he and Bard planned to deceive the foolish Nolfi, tricking her into reciting the words to avoid danger. Once the spaceship activated and left these waters, the sea prayer ritual would naturally conclude. There wouldn't be any follow-up. Whether it involved self-destruction or not, it wasn't a concern for her; she had achieved her essential goal.

However, the situation changed drastically, especially when the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society learned about the sea prayer ritual. Ultraman and Bard modified their plans, roping in external aid and reducing Nolfi's role. Eventually, she became bait to lead troublemakers, represented by Lumian Lee and Hidden Blade.

Lato Guiaro opened his mouth and muttered the words.

As he finished speaking, he looked expectantly at the spaceship at the sea bottom.

But nothing happened!

How is this possible? Lato Guiaro's heart tightened, feeling a sudden sense of danger.

With a jolt, he saw everything disintegrate like a soap bubble, vanishing.

Lumian, transformed into Brian, had arrived near him at some point.

A dream!

He had been dreaming since Juan Oro pulled the humanoid Sealed Artifact into the Cosmic Void!

Hela! This name flashed through Lato Guiaro's mind.

He had paid attention to whether there were other ships lurking around!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, formless hands appeared around Lato Guiaro, pushing Lumian away.

Then, he saw a sailboat, clearly abandoned by time, outlined in the cavity surrounded by seawater beside the betrothal ship. Shadows clung to its canvas, and corpses stood on the observatory. The deck was littered with decaying or boneless undead creatures.

At the bow of the ship, a woman dressed as a black widow stood silently.

Hela!

Less than four hours ago, Franca, posing as Charname, signaled Nolfi and Batna to wait for further arrangements. Returning to the cabin, she entered the captain's cabin and addressed Hela, standing by the window.

"I've roughly guessed who Ultraman is, but I can't be sure."

"I guessed as much," Hela replied, having overheard Franca and Nolfi's conversation.

Franca gritted her teeth and said, "If it's really Lato Guiaro, there will definitely be variables on the ship. I have to quickly summon Lumian's messenger and inform him of our guess."

"Let's wait a little longer and time it well. We'll send the message when the deputy hosts leave the Governor of the Sea's residence but prior to boarding the ship," Hela advised.

Franca confirmed succinctly, "Got it."

She observed Hela, with her light-blond hair naturally cascading over her shoulders, and her dark eyes seemingly darker as she meticulously engraved patterns and arranged items on the captain's cabin desk. With curiosity, she promptly inquired, "What's this for?"

"Setting up a ritual to completely conceal the entire ship, preventing anyone from discovering it. It's impossible for me to do this on my own. I can only achieve it through a deity's help. And She should be very willing to help."

Without hesitation, Hela took off the pure silver ring embedded with a black diamond from her right hand and placed it in the center of the altar.

On the betrothal ship, Lumian scrutinized Lato Guiaro, his body quivering with excitement.

He couldn't comprehend how the other party had thwarted the sea prayer ritual once again. After all, he had been vigilantly observing this "old friend" of his and hadn't witnessed any ring-switching.

Nonetheless, it didn't matter. A well-devised plan was not a fragile creation that crumbled with the slightest mistake. It had to allow for enough margin for error!

Similarly, Lato Guiaro couldn't fathom how Hela and the ship had approached without triggering his detection.

But it didn't matter. If they hadn't prepared for the interference of the Curly-

Haired Baboons Research Society and Hela, they wouldn't have taken action this time.

Lato Guiaro's eyes suddenly darkened, and specks of starlight illuminated.

The surrounding azure seawater froze once more.

Here, he surpassed the old-timer, Juan Oro. He had long amassed the power to temporarily become the Governor of the Sea!

In the upcoming period, he would ascend to become the god of these waters!

On the flower ship, Lato Guiaro extended his arms, and sunlight erupted from his body.

The sky dimmed, and the sea approached nothingness. Illusory stars emerged among them, expanding like distant suns.

In the next moment, Lato Guiaro swiftly spoke a few words in ancient Hermes with a grave expression, "God says entering dreams is ineffective!"

With the reinforcement of the sea's power, he neared the status of a Sequence 4 demigod. This allowed him to employ the Notary's "God says" ability more precisely, diminishing Hela's capacity to compel people into entering dreams.

Without this intervention, if Hela used her ability to forcefully restrain him without guiding him into an easily interruptible dream to gather information, breaking free from such a demigod's dream would prove challenging in a short time. He would become like a feral dog under anesthesia, at Lumian Lee's mercy.

The choice of "entering dreams is ineffective" over "sleeping is ineffective" was deliberate. The former was more specific and avoided potential ambiguity related to various abilities. Additionally, the Evernight pathway's induced slumber originated from being forcefully drawn into a dream, not the other way around. Essentially, it was a dream, not sleep.

As Lato Guiaro pronounced the ancient Hermes phrase "entering dreams is ineffective," his body still felt as weighty as the humanoid Sealed Artifact, though not as exaggerated.

This stirred massive waves in the surrounding seawater, attempting to fill the void.

The sailboat manipulated by the undead creatures visibly swayed, nearly capsizing, severely impeding Hela's further movements.

Immediately after, Lato Guiaro reclined even further. A miniature, bright sun manifested in his eyes.

Simultaneously, the ethereal sky and the stars emerging from the sea emitted light of varying intensities. They interweaved, crafting a splendid and pure blazing pillar of light.

The majestic pillar of light descended, enveloping the front half of the sailboat, where Hela stood. It melted the undead creatures there as if they had evaporated, leaving no trace of darkness.

Hela became engulfed by the pillar of light.

This was the Light of Holiness, an ability of a Sequence 5 Priest of the Light of the Sun pathway. Despite not consuming a corresponding Sequence 4 potion and lacking demigod-level abilities after becoming the temporary Governor of the Sea, Lato Guiaro could elevate his acquired abilities to near Sequence 4.

Moreover, the Light of Holiness had undergone a mutation. It no longer emanated from a single sun. All the stars in the Cosmic Void contributed to its power. Coupled with the uniqueness of these waters, while not as potent as the Sequence 4 Flaring Sun of this pathway in purifying and destroying impure entities, its attack range and area of influence had significantly expanded.

Having transmigrated into a Child of the Sea and possessing substantial boons, Lato Guiaro had carefully considered the Sun pathway potion, believing it posed no risks and might integrate with his bloodline and original abilities, bringing about remarkable changes.

The outcome aligned with his expectations.

Suddenly, Lato Guiaro pivoted.

In the space behind him, Lumian's figure swiftly materialized.

He intended to exploit Lato Guiaro's engagement with Hela to “teleport” closer, followed by a Spell of Harrumph.

Gone from his eyes was any suppressed violence or madness. There was no fear whatsoever, as if he didn't concern himself with the consequences of failing to assail the Governor of the Sea at close range.

In Lato Guiaro's dark and profound eyes, resplendent stars reflected. Before Lumian could utter the harrumph, he plunged into the void, disappearing beneath the vast and distant cosmos.

Lato Guiaro withdrew his gaze and focused on the sailboat illuminated by the residual light.

He found an adversary like Lumian Lee repulsive. It wasn't that he couldn't be forcibly eliminated, but doing so might only exacerbate matters. He could potentially incur the indiscriminate wrath of a high-ranking individual.

His decision was to leverage the authority of the Governor of the Sea to banish his foe into a self-created Cosmic Void, leaving him disoriented and unable to find an exit for the time being.

Once he assumed control of the spaceship and became the true Governor of the Sea, he planned to return and calmly resolve the issue.

At that precise moment, Juan Oro, entangled in a battle with the humanoid Sealed Artifact in his Cosmic Void, suddenly detected an anomaly.

His strength rapidly waned, and his dominion over the sea gradually diminished!

It seemed like his temporary authority as Governor of the Sea was being usurped.

In the blink of an eye, the tidal wave capable of shattering ships vanished from the Cosmic Void, followed by the illusory cosmos itself.

Juan Oro “reappeared” on the ship once more and “saw” the azure sea around him, towering like a mountain peak. He “saw” Simon Guiaro, closely linked to the sea.

“It's you!” His roar coincided with an involuntary bend, as if an invisible force pressed him down to the floor.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact had also returned, reinstating a formidable weight.

Lato Guiaro gazed at her, his face covered in scales tinged with starlight. Then, he pointed at Hela's ship and spoke in a fluent language, “¥%...&*”

He didn't comprehend the exact meaning of the sentence, but he understood that it could prompt the other party to attack a designated target.

Although he harbored no fear of Hela in these waters, he remained vigilant of Gandalf and others who might be on the ship. Therefore, he had to give his utmost effort.

The humanoid Sealed Artifact's sorrow dissipated slightly, and it nodded blankly.

Her body pivoted towards the sailboat, which bobbed in the “underwater waves.”

In an instant, Lato Guiaro bent down and grasped his throat.

Waa!

He ejected a slender, sticky blob of flesh.

The flesh contorted and writhed, swiftly taking on a human form.

Lato Guiaro promptly straightened up and seized the moment to command,

“Mad Lady, open the passageway to the spaceship!”

He wasn't concerned that Mad Lady might usurp the position of the Governor of the Sea and become the owner of the spaceship because she lacked the sea bloodline.

In the Cosmic Void crafted by Lato Guiaro, Lumian showed no urgency to find an exit or ascertain his coordinates. He simply “teleported” out.

He clasped his throat.

Waa!

He ejected a slender, sticky blob of flesh.

The flesh contorted and writhed, swiftly taking on a human form.

Solow Motel, adjacent to Lumian's suite.

Recalling that Invisibility and Shadow Concealment were futile against Marionettists, Jenna pondered ways to locate Loki's true form.

Drawing on information from the Major Arcana card holders, she knew a Marionettist had to be within five meters of a target to transform individuals into marionettes. In other words, Loki was undoubtedly within a five-meter radius of Lugano.

Dammit, it's all walls. My sight is blocked. Otherwise, spotting Loki would be easier. At this hour, most guests are away, celebrating the sea prayer ritual...

Walls... If there are no walls...

An idea struck Jenna.

She glanced at Anthony and blurted out, “Did you bring enough money?”

“What money?” In a rare instance, Anthony couldn't decipher Jenna's true thoughts.

Only then did Jenna realize her words had been too abrupt.

“Money to compensate the motel owner.

“I plan to blow up the opposite side, diagonally opposite, and the rooms below. We confirmed they're empty. If anyone's there, it's Loki or his marionette!

“I'll place the detonators here. They affect rooms within a seven-meter radius.

Lugano will likely be injured, but with the lady as a shield and being a Doctor, he can handle it.

“Right, the explosion will attract the Fertility Order's combat nuns!”

Jenna's train of thought gradually flowed smoothly as she spoke.

Are you a Hunter or a Demoness? Have you been influenced by Lumian... Anthony mused inwardly. “Do it. Time is running out. Lumian will cover the compensation; he's loaded.”

Jenna hurriedly searched her backpack for detonators. Simultaneously, she noticed Anthony setting up a simple altar.

Her heart stirred as she asked, “Do you wish to contact Madam Justice, Madam Judgment, or Madam Magician?”

“Either one works,” Anthony said seriously as he prepared for the ritual. “Although Madam Magician won't appear until the end to prevent Loki and his backer from noticing, she mentioned that at least two Major Arcana cards will arrive early and provide assistance at critical moments.”

“Got it.” Jenna had been uncertain about when to reach out for help and inform their Major Arcana cardholders, so she had been contemplating handling it herself.

Given Anthony's readiness to risk the disapproval of the Major Arcana cardholders, Jenna was naturally inclined to opt for the safest choice.

As Jenna stacked the detonators and other explosives near the adjacent door, Anthony Reid erected a spiritual barrier and summoned Madam Magician's messenger, briefing her on Loki's appearance.

Then, he swiftly took cover in the bathroom attached to the master bedroom, about six to seven meters away from the impending explosion.

Boom!

A fierce explosion tore through the fifth floor of Sauron Motel. Glass shattered, debris scattered, and crimson flames engulfed the surroundings.

Chapter 578 Marionettes

Amidst the thunderous explosion, the partition separating the two suites and the one facing the corridor crumbled simultaneously, wreaking havoc on nearby furniture, the ceiling above, the floor beneath their feet, and the rooms opposite, swiftly enveloping them in a surging inferno.

Jenna hadn't utilized all the explosives; otherwise, the entire fifth and fourth floors of Solow Motel would have collapsed in unison. Nevertheless, a section of the roof gave way, and the floor was strewn in chaos. The epicenter of the blast unveiled the room below.

As the walls of the adjacent rooms succumbed to the onslaught, the bricks and wood propelled by the shockwave slammed into Giorgia, causing her back to buckle, and her head to split open, unleashing a flow of vivid red blood. Lugano snapped out of his intermittent thoughts and bodily stiffness, regaining his composure.

Subsequently, he experienced searing pain as the violent shockwave, mixed with flames and debris, hurled him through the air.

Had it not been for Giorgia shielding him and with his robust Planter's physique, he likely would have faced severe injuries, teetering on the brink of death. Limbs could have been severed, or vital points struck. Despite this, he ended up a battered mess, with a few bones broken, nearly succumbing to unconsciousness.

Ludwig had sought refuge under the dining table at some point—along with his food. With the advantage of distance and the makeshift “shield,” he only bore the impact of the collapsed table.

Simultaneously, Jenna and Anthony burst out of the master bedroom washroom in their suite, their gazes fixed on the adjacent rooms where walls had crumbled, filling the air with swirling dust.

They vaguely discerned a figure.

The figure, bearing a striking resemblance to Rubiό Paco, stood beside the upturned recliner.

Loki! Jenna wasted no time. She condensed a dark, illusory flame and sent it hurtling towards her target.

Behind her, Anthony Reid's eyes took on a golden tint, pupils dilating. He was poised to lock onto Loki, ready to unleash Frenzy—a technique that would plunge Loki into an emotionally and psychologically triggered state, rendering him incapable of rational thought and effective response.

Just as Anthony and Jenna prepared to strike, their vision darkened, and Loki vanished.

They found themselves in a void, no blue sky or white clouds above, no solid ground below—just darkness embellished with a myriad of stars.

Cosmic Void!

This semi-real, semi-false illusion was a creation achievable by a Child of the Sea at a certain level.

In the void, Jenna and Anthony beheld a widowed woman in a black bonnet with subtle wrinkles in front of them.

Martha!

The Paco family's matriarch, now a marionette under Loki's control, was hidden in the room where Loki manipulated the Spirit Body Threads.

With sufficient preparation time, how could Loki not perform with his marionettes? He had two puppets with Beyond powers, and this was one of them. Another remained concealed, with the last slot reserved for specific situations, adaptable at will. It could be switched once an enemy was under control.

When Loki posed as Rubiό Paco, bringing Madam Martha to meet the Governor of the Sea, the family's matriarch was already a marionette. Thus, he had to ensure she stayed within his control range.

Lugano discerned Madam Martha's severe injuries primarily because a marionette was essentially comparable to a lifeless entity. A Marionettist's manipulation of her Spirit Body Threads allowed her to execute various actions, mimicking living characteristics. To a Sequence 8 Doctor, this appeared as grave injuries.

Had Lumian not infrequently observed others' luck without forming a habit, he would have realized that Madam Martha's fate was off. It was eerily still, resembling death.

Martha, a subtle smile on her face, lifted her right hand, a spectral green light coalescing at her fingertips.

The radiance morphed into a beam that streaked towards Jenna.

Having heard Lumian explain the sea bloodline's abilities, Jenna, at the sight of the spectral green light, rolled out of the Cosmic Void. Anthony followed suit. He refrained from using Frenzy on Martha since a marionette, essentially dead, wouldn't succumb to frenzy.

In the next moment, they both felt a weightiness, plummeting swiftly through the empty cosmos. They experienced the weightlessness Franca occasionally mentioned.

In the blink of an eye, Jenna and Anthony landed on the ground and steadied themselves, yet Martha was nowhere to be seen. The empty cosmos was shattering inch by inch.

They were still in Solow Motel, but they had descended from the fifth floor to the fourth.

This was because the mid- to low-level Cosmic Void resembled more of an illusion. There would be a barrier akin to a wall of spirituality around them. After falling into it, their bodies remained in reality. As they rolled and dodged, Martha nudged them forcefully with her formless power, causing them to plunge into the floor cavity created by the explosives.

Jenna didn't hesitate. She sprinted up the wall, seized a crack, and flipped back to the fifth floor where the explosion had occurred.

She saw Lugano tending to his injuries, and Loki and Madam Martha were absent from the room diagonally opposite.

Ludwig, who had hidden under the dining table, had vanished as well!

On Aquina Street, amid a lively folk celebration, Loki, having transformed into an inconspicuous passerby, carried Ludwig, who had "fallen asleep," through the crowd.

His other marionette, a Soul Assurer of the Evernight pathway, stayed concealed on the opposite side of Lumian's suite, ready to exert influence on the target.

Initially, Loki had dispatched his temporary marionette, Giorgia, to handle Lugano. He had manipulated the Doctor's Spirit Body Threads but refrained from deploying his more potent marionettes. It wasn't due to fear of alerting Ludwig, but rather a concern that an unseen adversary might be lurking in the shadows. After all, several lodgers in the motel hadn't left for the sea prayer ritual celebrations. A couple had returned before lunchtime next door, almost synchronizing with the target.

Moreover, a Marionettist's advancement ritual demanded a grand performance—a splendid and profound drama. Silent, unnoticed assassinations lacking a sufficient audience failed to meet the requirements.

Therefore, Loki intentionally singled out Lugano first. If there were no other foes lurking, it was akin to switching marionettes. If there were, he could draw them all to him and clandestinely manipulate the target with the other marionette nearby.

Aware that it was a sealed demigod, Loki knew its strength might be limited, but its essence remained unchanged. It was impervious to many influences. However, he believed the Evernight pathway's forced sleep would still be effective. Since this sealed demigod could experience

exhaustion, hunger, and the need for rest, food, and sleep like a true child, it implied that the seal had impacted corresponding characteristics, making him akin to an ordinary person in those aspects. At most, he would awaken faster and require less rest time.

A few seconds would be ample time for Loki to relocate and conceal himself with the target before attempting to manipulate the other party's Spirit Body Threads.

His two marionettes would act independently, confusing both enemies and the Earth Mother Church clergyman rushing over. They would lead them on a chase spanning about 100 to 200 meters, completing the corresponding performance.

As the time approached, the enemies would pinpoint his hiding spot through the marionettes' trajectory, joyfully anticipating an encounter. However, what awaited them would be a demigod-level marionette, leading to a terrifying and grim outcome.

Under the watchful eyes of the surrounding citizens, the magnificent play would conclude. Loki could consume the potion and ascend to Sequence 4, becoming a Bizarro Sorcerer!

On the betrothal ship, within Lato Guiaro's Cosmic Void.

This was fundamentally different from lower-middle-level abilities. It was both an illusory realm and an alternate space that could cause people to lose themselves and become abnormally fragile. It was akin to the Bottle of Fiction augmented with hallucinations.

The sticky blob of flesh Lumian had expelled squirmed rapidly, stretching and expanding into a discernible figure.

Cloaked in blood-red fabric with a matching hood obscuring its face in shadows, the figure revealed itself as none other than Mr. K of the Aurora Order.

To counter April Fool's machinations, Lumian had chosen the strategy of overwhelming force. He accomplished this with overt and imposing power, complemented by meticulous arrangements.

This plan allowed for a fair margin of error. Even if Lumian made a miscalculation, as long as April Fool's didn't have Angel-level helpers or three or more Saints, he could salvage the situation by retaining at least one or two key members.

To enhance their odds, Franca extended invitations to Hela and Gandalf. The Fertility Order also notified the higher-ups, ensuring the presence of a Saint overseeing Port Santa during the sea prayer ritual. The Tarot Club had two Major Arcana card holders positioned nearby. When April Fool's key members felt secure, Madam Magician, the Angel of Stars, would cross a long distance and descend as they prepared to depart!

For extra precaution, Lumian utilized Mr. K's finger to get him to Port Santa. Morphing with the Rose Bishop's power, he turned into a fleshy blob, and was concealed in Lumian's stomach to infiltrate the betrothal ship.

Mr. K glanced up, his eyes taking on an otherworldly illusion, as if concealing hidden doors.

Swiftly scanning the Cosmic Void, he identified an escape route.

"Follow me," he said to Lumian in a hoarse voice.

Nodding, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag, extracting the Flog boxing gloves and preparing to don them.

If you guys still have a backup plan or if a few powerhouses don't appear in time, I'll draw the attention of the evil gods and create chaos. We'll all face the danger together. Early exits? Forget about it!

Chapter 579 Energy Passage

On the betrothal boat, the humanoid Sealed Artifact ascended, her form suspended in the air. Striding through the atmosphere, she advanced toward the sailboat.

With the weight akin to a massive stone sphere, she manipulated the surrounding space, causing the target ship to shift automatically. The two factions drew near.

Concurrently, the vacant eyes of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, adorned in a black nun's attire, suddenly sparked with madness and chaos. Minute blood vessels protruded from the whites of its eyes, swiftly converging.

Accompanying her "affliction," the Maidens of the Sea, deputy hosts, and sailors on the betrothal ship, unaware of what transpired, stood motionless. Their expressions blank, eyes vacant, they succumbed to the same state as the humanoid Sealed Artifact.

In that moment, within the lingering Light of Holiness on the sailboat, which had traversed the void and approached the origin of Derangement, a light abruptly vanished, swallowed by the profound darkness.

In the darkness, a tranquil voice resonated, as if reciting a beautiful poem.

The expression of the humanoid Sealed Artifact softened significantly. The chaos and madness in her eyes dissipated, and her steps slowed.

The other individuals on the betrothal ship also entered a state of tranquility and drowsiness. Juan Oro felt the intangible force suppressing his body instantly dissipate.

Straightening up abruptly, he glared angrily at Simon Guiaro, positioned at the bow of the ship.

The president of the Fisheries Guild had a rough idea of the other party's identity. After all, not many comprehended the entire sea prayer ritual and knew the intricacies of the Ring of the Sea Queen. Combined with the fact that he hailed from the same family as Simon Guiaro, there was only one answer: Lato Guiaro!

"You traitor!" Even the distant chanting from the darkness couldn't pacify Juan Oro's anger. Although no longer the temporary Governor of the Sea, he still possessed considerable strength and could be deemed formidable at sea.

Splash!

The seawater at the bottom of the betrothal ship surged, part of it threatening to hurl everyone back to the surface, while others formed into towering peaks and crashed down on Lato Guiaro, masquerading as Simon Guiaro.

Lato abruptly pivoted, fixing his gaze on Juan Oro.

The azure “peak” poised to strike him froze in midair, its descent arrested. The water's attempt to push the betrothal ship out of this area also ceased its endeavors.

Reflected in Lato Guiaro's eyes was the figure of Juan Oro. The corners of his mouth curled up slightly as he stated a fact in a composed tone, “I am now the Governor of the Sea.”

“Your abilities, especially those affecting these waters, are completely suppressed by me. They are useless!

The incantation from the darkness targeted the humanoid Sealed Artifact. Everything else was secondary. As the interim Governor of the Sea, Lato Guiaro couldn't help but be affected. However, thanks to the feedback from the sea and the sharing of the burden, it didn't reach a profound level. He only became more tranquil, devoid of the desire for intense combat and direct killing.

Compared to Juan Oro, he was more concerned about whether Gandalf was on the sailboat besides Hela. He was more concerned about whether Mad Lady had opened the spaceship's passageway in time.

Juan Oro's heart sank as he witnessed the azure wave suspended in midair and Lato Guiaro, seemingly indifferent to him.

At that moment, Lato turned to Mad Lady, who had reverted to her human form, and addressed his companion, clad in an unusually flamboyant blood-colored dress,

“Hurry up.”

Mad Lady wasn't particularly tall, standing at over 1.6 meters. Her dark-blond hair was disheveled, influenced by the heaviness effect. None of it fluttered wantonly, pointing towards the seabed.

Her face concealed by pure flesh, making it challenging to discern her original appearance. She wore a ring on each hand.

On her left hand, there was a rose-gold ring embedded with a gem resembling crimson blood, and on her right, a simple, pure silver ring.

Mad Lady responded to Lato Guiaro with a smile, “So there are times when you're anxious.”

Only then did she cast her gaze at the silver-gray behemoth embedded in the seabed not far away.

This lunatic... Lato Guiaro cursed inwardly.

I Know Someone had an extremely nasty personality and subsequently succumbed to mental illness due to other reasons and was admitted to an asylum, but in contrast, Mad Lady had displayed an abnormal state of mind from the very beginning. In the past, she relied on I Know Someone's regular treatment to barely maintain her rationality, but now, she was becoming more and more insane.

Lato Guiaro took a deep breath, focusing on the peculiar sounds emanating from within the spaceship, resisting the distant chants echoing in the darkness.

Swiftly regaining his will to fight, he redirected his gaze to the sailboat, raising his right arm.

Upon witnessing this, Juan Oro's sense of despair deepened.

The white-haired old man clenched his fist, slamming it against his chest.

With a snap, his sternum broke, and his flesh tore open, releasing a torrent of blood that painted his body and the betrothal ship's deck red.

As life ebbed away, Juan Oro's white hair defied the heaviness effect, floating upwards.

His steps grew burdensome, each movement pressing down like a mountain on the ground.

Just as Lato Guiaro was poised to unleash the surrounding seawater, submerging the sailboat, he suddenly realized that the sea wasn't as obedient as before.

His Governor of the Sea position teetered on the brink of collapse.

Lato Guiaro turned his head once more, narrowing his eyes at Juan Oro, now covered in blood.

“Traitor, the sea will punish you!” Juan Oro's dark-green eyes focused, emitting a beam of blue light.

Accompanying this attack, he also intensified Lato Guiaro's heaviness, rendering him unable to move normally.

Two beams struck Lato Guiaro simultaneously, penetrating him and sinking into the sea.

Lato Guiaro's aura weakened slightly, but he wasn't as severely injured as Juan Oro believed.

Sunlight burst forth from the April Fool key member who used “Ultraman” as his code name, eradicating the residual corrosive powers and altering his body structure.

He lifted his chin slightly and uttered three words with strange pronunciations.

“%%&!”

This was also the language employed to activate the spaceship. The implication was likely akin to granting access, equivalent to obtaining a certain amount of Governor of the Sea power without “melding” with the sea after opening a crack in the seal. Lato Guiaro's usage now was to help him seize all authority back from Juan Oro.

Hmph, foolish fellow, a group of fools. They hadn't studied the sounds heard during every sea sacrifice after so many years. They guarded the treasure but failed to excavate it!

Sacrificing your life? Sacrificing yourself?

It's meaningless!

Brains and strength are the foundation!

Juan Oro, still bleeding from his chest, was surprised to discover that the authority of the Governor of the Sea had shifted again. He stared at Lato Guiaro in confusion and horror, as if looking at a true devil.

Why? Why does the sea favor him more?

Why does the sea favor this traitor more?

At that moment, Mad Lady, on the other side of the bow, completed reciting the incoherent order.

The silver-gray behemoth at the bottom of the sea trembled slightly, increasing in magnitude, causing the entire seabed and all the seawater to quake.

Inside, beams of pure light converged and shot out from the open entrance, landing at the edge of the betrothal ship, forming a transparent tunnel-like energy passageway.

Mad Lady didn't immediately leap into the pure light.

She understood that as the spaceship opened and activated further, the power accumulated in the depths of the seal would erupt. Everyone present, except the Governor of the Sea, would be torn apart.

But it didn't matter. She had a solution. The plain silver ring on her right hand, a gift from Bard, held the boon from honoring the ancestors. It could steal that power and distribute it, sharing the burden with all the Children of the Sea in Port Santa.

Of course, those present would receive more. Whether they could endure it or not depended on fate.

When the moment arrived, the Fisheries Guild members would believe the sea prayer ritual had succeeded, celebrating with joy. Little did they know that their "sea" had been stolen. The irony delighted Mad Lady.

Just as she was about to use the ring, a strong sense of Danger Premonition hit her.

In a flash, her figure vanished, reappearing a few steps away.

A shadow rose from the deck where she had stood, but it failed to envelop her.

Mad Lady then spotted Mr. K, draped in a blood-colored cloak and hood, and Lumian Lee, wearing the Lie earring but yet to revert to his original appearance.

Port Santa, Governor of the Sea's residence.

Bard stood by the window, gazing at the weeds outside. Silently calculating the time, he waited for the sea prayer ritual to progress.

If the sea's boon arrived with a delay and cheers erupted from Milo Village, he would openly leave this place, abandoning those who had been deceived.

When the moment arrived, anyone attempting to stop him would be torn apart by the power of the sea.

In the absence of a delayed collective boon, but with the sky and sea undergoing ominous changes, as if a catastrophe had struck, Bard could wait for the spaceship or Mad Lady to pick him up.

Of course, he wouldn't wait indefinitely. If there were no further developments from the sea prayer ritual within ten minutes, he would use his abilities to forcefully exit, shift positions, and conceal himself.

The early-stage abilities of the Marauder pathway weren't formidable. Bard had developed the habit of remaining vigilant as he advanced step by step.

As the weeds swayed in the bright sunlight and mild wind, Bard suddenly heard faint footsteps.

The sound emanated from the corridor outside, so subtle that it seemed almost like an illusion.

Chapter 580 Theft

Bard pivoted on his heels, fixing his eyes on the door.

A moment lingered in silence, but no one rapped against the wooden barrier. The once-present soft footsteps in the corridor had now faded into nothingness.

As a seasoned Beyonder, Bard dismissed the notion of hallucination. Returning to the servant's bed, he grabbed the backpack containing the spoils of the year, feigning an escape from the Governor of the Sea's residence before confirming the outcome of the sea prayer ritual.

Such precautions were only sensible. Not everyone placed full trust in Juan Oro's promises.

Bard slung the backpack over his shoulder and slyly opened the window, aiming to slip into the weeds below.

Suddenly, a figure, standing over a meter tall, emerged from the shadows in the corner. Its disproportionately large head and wrinkled face identified it as one of the Little Devils from the sea spawn.

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The Little Devil gestured for Bard to close the glass window.

Just a bunch of creatures with low IQs, Bard thought, mocking them inwardly. Despite generations, they have yet to master Highlander and can only barely communicate like dogs...

Maintaining a timid expression, Bard closed the window.

Having tested the waters, he had a rough idea of where the sea spawn responsible for monitoring him were hiding.

None of them appeared to have any connection to the soft footsteps echoing in the corridor, nor did they seem aware of them.

On the betrothal boat, Mad Lady, draped in a blood-colored dress with a portion of her face showing pure flesh and blood, instantly vanished upon spotting Mr. K and Lumian. She swiftly changed her position.

Simultaneously, a figure materialized behind and to her side—Lumian and Mr. K.

Employing their teleportation abilities, they blocked Mad Lady.

After Mad Lady shifted to the opposite side of the deck, the corners of her mouth, made of pure flesh and blood, curled up. Her grayish-green eyes gleamed with anticipation and excitement.

Come and attack me. Chase me. This way, no one will use the item that honored the ancestors to steal the deep power about to erupt. Let's see who reacts the fastest and 'teleports' out of these waters when the time comes!

For those unable to escape in time, they would undoubtedly be torn to pieces by the violent power, much like the fate that befell others on the ship!

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Mad Lady swiftly turned transparent, evading Lumian's crimson near-white fireballs and Mr. K's light-green wind blades.

Amidst the rumbling explosion, Ultraman Lato Guiaro was equally infuriated by Mad Lady's actions. If he were still the temporary and complete Governor of the Sea, he wouldn't fear the impact of the potent power in the spaceship. He hadn't intended to release Mad Lady and use Bard's silver ring.

However, the situation had changed. Juan Oro, burning his life and sacrificing flesh and blood, had contested him for the authority of the Governor of the Sea.

In this state, Ultraman couldn't be certain if he was fully protected or if he would suffer some level of damage. Furthermore, not being a true demigod, he wasn't sure if he could withstand such a blow, one that left him only injured.

He couldn't help but urge Mad Lady with his eyes, but his companion was 'teleporting' and didn't have time to meet his gaze. The humanoid Sealed Artifact remained immersed in distant chanting in the darkness, oblivious to the impending sea's fury.

In the blink of an eye, corporeal starlight surged from the silver-gray behemoth at the bottom of the sea. It followed the condensed energy passageway and struck the betrothal ship with a tsunami-like sound, aiming to devour everything around it.

“Here it comes!” Mad Lady eagerly prepared for her extreme escape.

Confronted with the immense wave of starlight, Lumian's initial reaction was, Why is there another sea's fury?

Relying on his combat instincts, he immediately extended his spirituality to the Lie earring on his left ear, activating the high-level stealing power attached to the mystical item.

The starlight in his eyes took on a more tangible form, as if it had materialized.

Lumian's raised left hand subtly twisted his wrist.

The starlight surging from the silver-gray behemoth changed its course, rushing towards Lumian in waves, engulfing the sky and the sea.

This was even more terrifying than the previous sea's rage. At that moment, Lumian felt as if an apocalypse had descended.

He knew very well that he couldn't absorb all the stolen power himself. Doing so would render him unable to endure, crushed into rotten meat on the spot, indirectly aiding Termiboros in escaping His predicament. Fortunately, the stolen power linked to “honoring the ancestors” had the ability to disperse the boon obtained and share it with everyone present and all those with the sea bloodlines in Port Santa, similar to every successful sea prayer ritual.

Though a bit greedy and reluctant, Lumian restrained himself. Without hesitation, he opened his left hand, seemingly grasping something, and twisted his wrist in the opposite direction.

Suddenly, the starlight that had darkened the sky and sea seemed to explode from within, scattering radiant starlight in every direction.

“The stars are raining...” Franca, concealed in the cabin on the sailboat, lamented. She tightly clutched the Major Arcana card belonging to Judgment in her hand.

This wasn't a plea for Madam Judgment to descend directly. After all, this wasn't within her jurisdiction. It was to signal the location for the Major Arcana card holders who had already gathered nearby.

The beams of starlight left dazzling trails as they penetrated the bodies of those nearby and soared towards the bloodline connections farther away.

Lumian couldn't control this process, so he could only sense a portion of the starlight landing on him, causing his left chest to burn and corrode his flesh. Simultaneously, he witnessed a significant amount of starlight being drawn towards the potent sea bloodline and the authority of the Governor of the Sea, surging towards Ultraman and Juan Oro.

Undoubtedly, the humanoid Sealed Artifact received the most boons.

Like the eye of a vortex, she incessantly absorbed the surrounding starlight. Even the starlight heading towards Hela's sailboat diminished noticeably.

Ultraman experienced a replenishment, breaking free from his weakened state after Juan Oro's two beams, swiftly reclaiming the authority of the Governor of the Sea.

In his moment of elation, Ultraman Lato Guiaro felt intense surprise and confusion.

Why can Lumian Lee also steal the spacecraft's power?

That requires a high-level stealing ability...

Hasn't Bard's ring already been placed on the altar to honor the ancestors? And we've confirmed its corresponding effects.

Isn't the enchantment only possible once a year?

Amidst the echoing shock, Lato Guiaro couldn't be bothered to ponder the answer. His instinctive reaction was to swiftly crush Juan Oro. Otherwise, who knew what he, now strengthened, would do!

At that moment, Juan Oro felt a surge of regained strength. He observed his cracked chest and hazy flesh, now covered in starlight scales, with blood flowing out dyed in a resplendent "color."

Gazing at Lato Guiaro, he suddenly smiled—a smile of relief, yearning, and evident anger.

His body underwent a rapid transformation, eyes turning vertical, scales growing, and limbs thickening. In the span of a breath, he morphed into a humanoid lizard.

During this process, Lato Guiaro condensed a dark-green light that descended on Juan Oro in a series of rays.

Juan Oro made no attempt to dodge; he endured it.

His aura rapidly weakened, precisely as he desired.

His lizard-like form faded, growing increasingly translucent, as if condensed from starlight.

Then, Juan Oro merged into the void representing the sea and spoke to Lato Guiaro with a complex expression, "I've returned to the sea. Come quickly too..."

At the last few words, Juan Oro gnashed his teeth, not concealing his deep-

seated hatred.

Every Child of the Sea was prepared to return to the sea, and Juan Oro was no exception. However, he hadn't anticipated doing so in this manner.

His sole desire now was for Lato Guiaro to join him!

Juan Oro's figure dissipated, becoming entirely a part of the "sea."

Ultraman Lato Guiaro immediately sensed a growing animosity between his title as Governor of the Sea and the waters. The harmony that once existed had given way to a resistance emanating from the Power of the Sea.

This indicated that the Governor of the Sea authority he had acquired wouldn't be complete for some time.

Damned old fellow! Lato Guiaro cursed inwardly, but he remained composed.

He had realized that Hela was the sole demigod on the sailboat. The humanoid Sealed Artifact, having received a boon from the sea and escaped the influence of the chanting, was sufficient to hold off the opposition for a while.

Though uncertain why Gandalf and the others hadn't arrived, Ultraman Lato Guiaro welcomed this turn of events.

It allowed him to focus on dealing with Lumian Lee and his ally!

Despite being an incomplete Governor of the Sea, he possessed enough strength to control adversaries below the demigod level briefly and gain entry to the spaceship first. Moreover, Mad Lady's assistance added to his advantage.

Having received the sea's boon, Lumian contemplated his newfound capabilities.

Now, I seem qualified to contend for the authority of the Governor of the Sea...

Although I can't be considered to possess the sea bloodline and only wield some power of the sea lasting a week, far inferior to Ultraman, my fake level is high enough. I'm at the Angel level!

Just as Ultraman Lato Guiaro and Lumian responded swiftly, the gray sky suddenly brightened.

Thick bluish-green vines descended, shrouding the two ships and the surrounding area in torrential rain. Soon, they intertwined into a giant-like forest growing above the sea.