

Inevitability 601

Chapter 601 Strange Patient

Late at night, amidst another round of cheers for a magic trick, Lumian downed the candied wine in his hand and exited the bar with a smirk.

He could already picture Aurore—if she were around—scoffing, “You're so lame. You're actually using the Governor of the Sea's authority and power to pull off a magic trick. Deceiving those drunkards with the real thing. Is this your prank? You're sure having a blast.”

Lumian responded silently, Being able to utilize superpowers and the Governor of the Sea's authority for such matters, rather than in battle, should be what you desire, right? Isn't this the joy and future you yearned for?

In the corridor, illuminated by kerosene wall lamps, Lumian stepped on the creaking floor, making his way back to the first-class suite in the silent, empty surroundings.

Snores and moans occasionally penetrated the walls on both sides. Near the stairs, a room stood open, reflecting the dim yellow light of the fire.

As Lumian passed by, he turned his head and observed the Sacred Emblem of Life, representing Earth Mother, engraved on the wall deep in the room. It portrayed a simple infant amidst wheat ears, flowers, spring water, and other symbols.

In front of the Sacred Emblem of Life stood a man in a brown clergyman's robe. He was less than 30 years old, with clean eyebrows and a light brown beard. Holding a thick book, he preached to the men and women seated in different parts of the room.

Lumian knew this was a prayer room, akin to a small, mobile cathedral with a dedicated clergyman in charge. Common in countries that believed in only one deity, be it on long-distance ships or steam locomotives, they considered the need for believers to quietly pray and listen to teachings.

Lumian, who could already understand Highlander, memorized the words, “Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace.” Retracting his gaze, he entered the corridor, ascending the stairs step by step.

Simultaneously, Lugano, having just finished attending to Ludwig's supper, heard a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” Lugano was surprised and intrigued.

This couldn't be his employer. He possessed the key and would simply open the door.

Moreover, it was nearly 11 p.m. Who would visit at such an hour?

Could it be that a woman overheard my boasting on the deck, believed me, and came to share a pleasant night?

As Lugano started to indulge in fantasies, he heard a feeble male voice.

“I'm here to see Dr. Lugano.”

Seeking a doctor... Lugano couldn't help but frown, but he still opened the door.

Outside stood a man wrapped in a thick tweed coat, a stark contrast to Lugano's linen shirt and thin pants.

Lugano scrutinized the visitor.

"I'm Lugano. What's the matter?"

The man's face was pale, his eyes dark, revealing little vitality. Though young, in his early twenties, he exuded a lifeless aura.

The man took a deep breath and weakly said, "You can call me Enio. I heard that you helped several people on the deck discover the true cause of their illness and quickly improved their condition. I want you to treat me.

"I have the money to pay for the consultation."

Observing the fellow's sickly appearance, Lugano sighed and replied, "Come in. Keep your voice down. As you know, I'm the private doctor of a prominent figure. He doesn't appreciate strangers disturbing him."

Once Enio settled on the sofa, Lugano, out of habit, inquired about his condition to conceal his subsequent mystical diagnosis.

"What's wrong with your body?"

Enio paused for a moment before saying, "Since half a month ago, I've become sensitive to the cold and weak. No appetite. Runny nose, repeated coughing, and my condition is worsening."

"Mm..." Lugano nodded, raising his right hand and tapping his forehead, as if contemplating the significance of the patient's narrative.

In reality, he seized the opportunity to activate his Spirit Vision, preparing to discern the other party's illness from the color, brightness, and thickness of his Ether Body.

With a swift glance, Lugano nearly jumped out of his skin.

Is the patient sitting in front of me still alive?

In Lugano's eyes, the once white glow shrouding Enio's Ether Body, signifying overall balance, had turned a somber grayish-black. It was a dire indication of his severe illness, teetering on the edge of death.

Yet, it wasn't this revelation that left Lugano shocked and bewildered. What truly sent shivers down his spine was: the orange glow, symbolizing the health of excretion, detoxification, and other vital organs, had dimmed into complete darkness. No vestige of brightness remained, signaling the complete cessation of their functions!

Likewise, the yellow hue representing the digestive system, the green indicating the heart and regulatory system, and the blue denoting the throat and part of the nervous system had all dulled and lost their radiance.

Enio's remaining hues were red on his limbs and purple on the surface of his head.

W-what does this “diagnosis” imply?

This meant that Enio was a person with a silent heart, a dormant stomach, and internal organs that had relinquished their functions. Yet, he could still think, move, and speak!

Son of a bitch, where did this monstrosity come from! Lugano, facing such an unprecedented “patient,” inwardly cursed, his frame trembling slightly.

He dreaded the moment when the other might unexpectedly utter, “Doctor, I'm cold. Let me borrow your skin. Doctor, I'm hungry. Let me borrow your stomach and intestines...”

Noticing Lugano's silence, Enio anxiously inquired, “Doctor, what illness am I suffering from?”

Illness? Lugano muttered to himself urgently, Snap out of it! Your heart has ceased beating; the absence of flowing blood naturally brings about a chilling sensation!

Those with non-agitating stomachs certainly won't have much of an appetite!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lugano pondered for a moment and declared,

“Your condition is grave. I require further analysis and observation to draw conclusions. Can you visit me tomorrow morning?”

“Before that, I need to draw some of your blood for research.”

“No problem.” Despite Enio's lack of confidence in Lugano, he extended his right hand with the mindset that attempting something was better than nothing.

Armed with the necessary tools, Lugano extracted some blood from Enio's body using a needle, rubber hose, and a glass blood collection bottle. Despite their darkened hue, he noted a basic vitality still present. Subsequently, he listened to Enio's heartbeat and detected faint, but existing, beats.

Curious... Lugano seized the opportunity of the consultation and prescription to subtly cast a faint light upon his palm, providing Enio with a simple treatment.

Enio's spirits lifted, and a semblance of strength returned.

“Thank you, Doctor. Your massage and medicine are effective. I appreciate it!” Enio left the suite with a cheerful expression.

None of the previous doctors he had consulted had made the slightest improvement in his condition. This time, he intended to set sail to the south, take a steam locomotive to the Church of Earth Mother's headquarters for treatment.

Baffled, Lugano observed as Enio left. Soon after, his employer returned.

He quickly recounted the encounter to Lumian, concluding with, “I've secured his blood. Can you find someone to divine the truth?”

“Divination?” Lumian chuckled as he received the blood-filled bottle and knocked on Ludwig's child's room.

“Take a sip and see what knowledge you can glean.” Lumian handed the bottle to Ludwig, ensuring no avenue of exploitation slipped by.

Ludwig's expression remained stoic, as if sipping bedtime milk. He drank down the liquid in the bottle without flinching.

Lugano was bewildered, his eyes reflecting surprise and confusion.

After tasting the blood, Ludwig spoke at an adequate pace, "Absent stomach, absent small and large intestine, absent lungs, absent liver and pancreas..."

"It's akin to a deceased person relying on mystic forces to persist..."

"He won't last a week..."

Wh... Lugano was taken aback that Ludwig not only imbibed human blood but also made somber judgments with a straight face. He was also shocked to learn that Enio truly lacked those organs.

Initially, he believed it was just a loss of corresponding function.

According to Ludwig, wasn't Enio essentially a dead man?

What had he stumbled upon?

"What should we do?" Lugano turned to Lumian.

Lumian couldn't help but chuckle softly.

"What can we do? Locate the captain, the ship's security supervisor, or the priest in the prayer room, and report this matter. They'll handle it."

Lugano nodded and tentatively asked, "But won't this expose me as a Beyonder?"

"Tell them you're Louis Berry's servant," Lumian advised calmly.

"Alright." Lugano was fine with being a servant. After a moment's thought, he asked in puzzlement, "Did you hear any strange sounds at night? I occasionally hear a baby crying."

"Baby?" Lumian asked, shaking his head. "I didn't hear it."

Lugano pondered aloud, "Is there a baby crying on this floor?"

Then, he looked at Lumian.

"Shall I go find the captain now?"

Lumian's eyes flickered as he smiled and said, "Tomorrow morning."

"Alright," Lugano agreed without hesitation.

He preferred waiting for dawn and sunlight before addressing such a peculiar issue. Reporting it at night made him sense an impending, unexpected event.

The sun provided a reassuring sense of security!

Lumian didn't question or provide further advice. He entered his room, freshened up, and went to bed.

However, sleep eluded him. Instead, he half-closed his eyes, anticipating something.

After an indeterminate period, Lumian heard a faint creak.

The door to one of the rooms opened softly.

Lumian swiftly sat up, silently approaching the door, cracking it open.

He saw a figure leisurely walk out of Lugano's servant's room.

It was Lugano, clad in a linen shirt. His eyes were open but oddly vacant and unfocused, his face devoid of expression.

As if sleepwalking, Lugano made his way to the suite's door.

Chapter 602 "Surgery"

Lugano's eyes remained open as he swung open the door to the suite, his gaze vacant. He stepped into the deserted corridor, where only the sound of crashing waves reverberated.

In this moment, everyone, save for the sailor on night duty, succumbed to slumber.

Lugano moved forward, the kerosene wall lamps around him casting an ethereal glow that mingled with the encroaching darkness.

He reached the end of the floor and halted in front of a vivid vermilion wooden door.

Creak. The door groaned open, and the darkness within seemed to swallow every trace of light.

Lugano traversed the obscurity with a blank expression, entering the room. Behind him, the vermilion door was pulled shut by an imperceptible force.

It was a suite. The living and dining areas lay shrouded in darkness, devoid of any candlelit glow. The faint crimson moonlight filtered through the curtains, offering minimal visibility.

At the dining table stood two shadowy figures. One of them appeared aged, with mostly gray hair and dark, deep blue eyes that seemed to absorb the night.

Despite the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, the elder's skin remained well-maintained, adorned in a loose, dark-black robe.

Beside him stood Enio, the brown-haired, brown-eyed patient who had intruded upon Lugano that night, his pale face devoid of life. His vacant gaze fixated on the unadorned table.

Lugano, as if sleepwalking, stood next to Enio, unusually quiet.

The elder in the loose black robe turned his head, fixing his gaze on Enio.

The patient ambled towards the dining table, climbed on it, and lay completely motionless.

The blond elder brandished a sharp scalpel, unfastening Enio's tweed coat, cashmere sweater, and cotton shirt. He pressed the razor-sharp blade against Enio's chest, producing a ripping sound as he sliced through layers of flesh, creating a long wound.

As Enio's chest and abdominal cavity lay exposed to the crimson moonlight, a void greeted the eye.

No stomach, no lungs, no small or large intestines, liver, or kidneys. Only a weakly beating bright red heart, accompanied by a few blood vessels extending from it.

With a swift motion, the old man in the dark-black robe manipulated the scalpel, his other hand flickering with a faint light as he pressed down.

In a sequence too rapid for the eye to follow, he withdrew the still-beating heart in his left hand.

Enio's chest and abdomen, now empty, displayed only a few non-bleeding blood vessels.

The old man closed the incision with a tight squeeze, sealing it with a flickering light.

Enio's stomach returned to its original state, devoid of any scars.

Throughout this extraordinary procedure, the special patient's eyes remained open, as if untouched by the surgical ordeal.

In that moment, he rolled off the dining table, ambled to the door, and exited the room.

The old man opened his suitcase, revealing glass jars containing pale amber liquid, each cradling various organs: spleen, lungs, liver, kidneys, stomach, and intestines...

Placing these items on the dining table in a peculiar order, surrounding the still gently beating scarlet heart, the old man in the loose black robe took a step back. He recited an ancient, malevolent, yet strangely intimate language.

As the unknown murmur resonated, the internal organs ascended slowly, upheld by an invisible force.

Their final positions varied, resembling the internal organs of a standing human.

The heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys emitted a faint glow simultaneously, outlining a form on the dining table. It lacked a head, limbs, or bones, merely a corporeal essence that grew more defined.

A baby's cry echoed, faint yet tangible.

However, the body distorted, squirmed, and disintegrated in the end.

The old man in the loose black robe sighed with regret.

Strangely, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were noticeably reduced, and much of his white hair had reverted to light gold.

In an instant, he appeared seven or eight years younger.

Sensing his good condition, the elder turned his attention to Lugano.

Lugano, seemingly summoned, approached the dining table and lay down, awaiting with open eyes.

The elder unbuttoned Lugano's linen shirt, took up the scalpel, and gestured as if deciding where to make the incision.

Suddenly, a loud bang reverberated.

The vermilion door swung open, crashing into the wall.

Crimson flames surged, illuminating the room, climbing the walls and ceiling, transforming the place into a fiery inferno.

Lumian, adorned in black hair, green eyes, a golden straw hat, a cotton shirt, a black vest, and dark pants, materialized at the door and entered the suite.

He calmly addressed the old man in the loose black robe, “Don't you know he's my servant?”

The elder's eyes narrowed as he readied the scalpel to descend towards Lugano's neck.

However, his right hand refused to budge, seemingly restrained by an invisible force pushing it upward.

In the midst of the rising crimson flames, Lumian paused, displaying no urgency to act. He spoke with intrigue,

“That surgery was quite fascinating—extracting internal organs while leaving the person alive, albeit gradually dying.

“And you used those organs for a ritual, rejuvenating yourself. Meanwhile, you nearly brought forth a peculiar lifeform.”

Surprise flickered in the elder's dark-blue eyes.

“How do you know?”

Haven't you just arrived in pursuit of your servant?

And no one entered before you!

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

“You don't need to know.”

I still have a few hours of Governor of the Sea authority. Isn't it easy to 'see' something in these waters?

Sensing Lumian's confidence, certainty, ease, and absence of hostility, the elder fell silent briefly before expressing, “Life is the most precious, so life becomes the finest sacrifice and ingredient.”

He refrained from divulging details about the surgery or ritual, choosing instead to expound on his philosophy and the truth he sought.

Praising and blaspheming life simultaneously? Lumian arched his eyebrows, finding it vaguely reminiscent of Lady Moon, Madame Night, and the bestowed of the Great Mother.

Carefully assessing the black-robed elder behind the dining table, Lumian, upon confirming his gender, temporarily set aside his sudden anxiety.

Gazing down at the motionless Lugano on the dining table, Lumian casually inquired, “How did you control my servant?”

The elder fixed Lumian with a penetrating gaze, as if probing the depths of his intentions. He pondered, weighing the decision to preach the truth or engage in a confrontation to eradicate the issue.

After a brief silence, he spoke in a resonant voice,

“He's a Blessed of the Great Mother. He heard the cries of the Son of God.”

Great Mother? Lumian's scalp tingled at the term.

Had it not been for the Sea Governor's authority, Lumian would have launched a full-scale attack without allowing the elder a moment to react or explain.

Regardless, even if he eliminated the elder, spirit channeling remained a viable option. Moreover, the elder could be fed to Ludwig!

Though taken aback by the elder's possible reference to Lugano as a Blessed of Earth Mother, Lumian swiftly dismissed the apparent meaning.

He was certain that Lugano was human and harbored no unusual bloodlines.

Following Lugano's injury at Solow Motel, Jenna collected his splattered blood and conducted Magic Mirror Divination according to Lumian's subsequent instructions.

In an instant, Lumian deciphered the elder's true meaning.

The Beyonders of the Planter pathway are all Blessed of the Great Mother?

Where does Earth Mother stand? Planter is the main pathway of the Church of Earth Mother...

Could it be... the Great Mother reigns over multiple pathways, akin to the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool? Planter and Sower? The names bear a striking connection...

As Lumian's thoughts raced, his focus intensified on the existence of the Son of God. Cordu's empty infant cradle and the honorific title of Lady Moon nurturing a deity flooded his mind.

Dammit, why is it that the Great Mother seems entwined with children, Sons of God, and babies? Does that entity have a penchant for offspring? Lumian smirked superficially.

"It seems your Son of God hasn't truly been born."

The old man in the loose black robe suddenly became fervent.

"He's already born in the spirit world, but He's yet to step into the real world.

"Don't you see? Just revealing His form made me a few years younger. If He were truly born, I'd instantly regain my youth!"

Who knows what malevolent creation you've unleashed... Lumian criticized and said, "You plan to shape the Son of God's body with just this fragment of life?"

The elder was taken aback.

"This is a ritual bestowed by the Great Mother's revelation. It's undeniably effective!"

Lumian smiled.

"That Enio is unmistakably an ordinary person. The ritual's effects won't bode well. If it were a Beyonder with a robust life force, the outcome might be entirely different."

The elder instinctively concurred, "Indeed. That's why I intended to examine your servant's internal organs..."

At this juncture, the elder halted, casting a wary glance at Lumian.

With a beaming smile, Lumian proposed, "Have you ever thought of sacrificing your own internal organs?"

"If you don't offer yourself as a sacrifice, how can you showcase your devotion to the Great Mother and your reverence for the Son of God?"

"Don't fret; the Son of God will revive you and bestow youth upon you!"

As he concluded his words, a dark-green light condensed in Lumian's right hand.

Chapter 603 Organs Again

The dark-green light morphed into a beam, slamming into the old man's chest and sinking into the loose black robe, akin to sunlight, unstoppable.

Already appearing seven to eight years younger, the old man's expression twisted, and every inch of exposed skin displayed signs of melting.

His aura rapidly waned.

Simultaneously, a burst of vigorous life force erupted from his body. Under the melting skin, flesh and blood writhed, resisting the mutation.

The black-robed old man's eyes darkened, and he abruptly faded away.

In an instant, a hazy face emerged from the armchair at the dining table, blending with the brown wood, about to gain clarity.

At that moment, a cascade of flames descended from the crimson-flame-covered ceiling, soaking the armchair and swiftly setting it ablaze.

Before the brown face could fully materialize, it succumbed to the raging flames, forced to retreat.

Lumian lost sight and sense of the black-robed elder subsequently.

While surveying the surroundings, Lugano, lying on the dining table, suddenly sat up and jumped down. He stared at Lumian with vacant eyes, like a wandering zombie.

Lumian chuckled, raising his right hand and pointing at Lugano.

With this gesture, specks of brilliance shimmered in his eyes, as if the cosmos had descended.

Lugano found himself in an empty night sky, surrounded by twinkling stars.

He stood rooted to the ground in a daze. Without any subsequent actions, he resembled a machine that had lost its energy and controller.

Having settled his servant, Lumian surveyed his surroundings once more.

Yet, his eyes brimmed with flowing and burning crimson flames, and the black-robed elder's figure remained elusive.

Lumian's expression remained stoic as he splayed the five fingers on his right hand, clenching them into a fist.

His body suddenly grew heavy, and the flames surrounding him surged towards him like a river converging into the sea, drawn by an invisible force.

Bottles, organs from various body parts, and lightweight items in the room soared towards Lumian.

On the wooden coat rack near the door, the transparent figure of the black-robed elder protruded, pulled away by an unseen force.

He fought with all his might, but he couldn't resist the pull towards Lumian. It was akin to a piece of wood caught in a flood or a thin leaf fluttering in a fierce wind.

Lumian's left hand was already raised, and the crimson, nearly white flame in his palm rapidly turned white under the intense suction force, forming a minuscule ball.

Layers of compressed white-hot fireballs were unleashed, and the weighty and fearsome suction force dissipated.

Pa! The black-robed elder finally landed on the floor, his vision completely engulfed by the blazing white fireball.

Rumble!

The blazing white fireball collided with the Beyonder conducting the sinister surgery and strange ritual. The explosion's sound echoed into the distance but was muffled by the darkness shrouding the room, preventing it from permeating.

In the midst of such a violent explosion, no one on the ship heard or sensed anything awry.

Rumble!

The black-robed elder's body was shredded by the devastating explosion. Countless corpse fragments were instantly charred or consumed by bright flames, scattering across every corner of the living room and dining room.

With spirit channeling at his disposal and Ludwig providing support, Lumian reveled in the authority of the Governor of the Sea and the nearly demigod-level power it bestowed. He cared not for what the enemy might transform into.

Incredible. Is this what it's like to be a demigod? Even if it's just an illusion... Sadly, it won't last beyond six in the morning... Lumian sighed, directing his gaze at the burning corpse fragments.

A quick inspection revealed that the black-robed elder's flesh had rapidly charred or turned to ashes. It was as if frost had met magma from a volcanic eruption.

In a matter of seconds, only the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys, intestines, and stomach remained in the room, along with a grayish-white half-charred brain.

Wh... Even with his feet, Lumian could tell that something was awry.

Except for the brain, the remnants of the enemy were all internal organs.

The malevolent surgery he had just completed involved extracting someone's internal organs to let them live as if nothing happened!

At the same time, the peculiar ritual he performed utilized the complete set of internal organs to attempt to reconstruct the so-called Child of God's body!

All internal organs—it was hard for Lumian not to draw a connection.

Could it be that this fellow's internal organs were extracted before, and he survived by piecing together others' internal organs, becoming a Beyonder? What's this called? Human alchemy? If it's true, who took his internal organs? Lumian pondered silently.

The stars in his eyes swiftly dissipated, and Lugano returned to the real world.

From a distance of four to five meters, Lumian raised his right hand and smoothly swung it.

Smack!

Lugano felt the impact of an invisible force against his face.

With a sudden jolt, his eyes gradually cleared of their blank stare.

The first sight that greeted Lugano was the crimson flames falling around him, extinguishing before causing any havoc.

Then, he noticed charred body parts, scattered internal organs, glass jars filled with light-amber liquid, and organs soaked in them.

Am I still dreaming? Is this a nightmare? Just as this thought crossed Lugano's mind, the image of his employer, Louis Berry, with black hair and green eyes, appeared before him.

Son of a bitch, this dream took an unexpected turn! Lugano shuddered and involuntarily inquired, “What happened?”

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, “What dream did you just experience?”

What dream? Lugano confirmed his wakefulness and recollected, “I dreamed of my childhood. My mother stood at the door, urging me to come home for dinner. She even sang a nursery rhyme from my hometown...”

“She's been gone for almost ten years. I miss her dearly. I kept walking towards the door, but I couldn't reach her...”

At that moment, Lugano realized that this wasn't their suite. He exclaimed in shock,

“What happened?”

With a smile, Lumian responded, “You slept until midnight and suddenly sleepwalked all the way here. An old man had plans to operate on you, remove your kidneys, and slowly turn you into a patient like Enio.”

The more Lugano listened, the more fear gripped him. Earlier, he had wondered how someone like Enio, who had lost most of his internal organs, could still be alive, albeit turning weak—only to realize that he was so close to turning into a similar figure!

“Hiss...” Lugano gasped and asked with trepidation, “Where's that old man?”

“That's all that remains.” Lumian gestured at the internal organs and the grayish-white, half-charred brain on the ground.

Without giving Lugano a chance to sigh, Lumian instructed, “Bring Ludwig here.”

It was also almost time for his midnight snack.

Lugano hastily left the suite, grateful for choosing to follow Lumian to the Southern Continent.

Otherwise, he would be at the mercy of such situations elsewhere!

Lugano believed this matter had nothing to do with Lumian. He had brought it upon himself. If it were Trier, he might have encountered a similar patient who had lost internal organs.

Lumian watched him leave, raised his right hand, and stroked his chin.

Simply hearing the infant's cries from the failed ritual can influence Beyonders of the Planter pathway to sleep and act in a sleepwalking state, receiving corresponding orders?

Isn't this too exaggerated? It's an absolute suppression on the Planter pathway...

I could understand a similar phenomenon if that ritual had succeeded, and the Child of God was truly born. Yet, it's already this powerful despite being a failed product?

Even with the limitation of its range, it's still terrifying... Is there a key reason I don't know?

Moreover, can only Beyonders of the Planter or Sower pathways hear the Child of God's cries? Can the Apothecary pathway, which can interchange with the Planter pathway, also hear it?

Amidst Lumian's thoughts, Lugano led Ludwig into the suite.

Faced with this gruesome scene, Ludwig pressed his hand to his mouth and yawned.

"Where's the food?"

Lumian didn't make any immediate requests. Instead, he turned to Lugano.

"Guard the door."

With the prior experience of the blood-drinking incident, Lugano could vaguely guess what was about to happen. He didn't dare face it directly. Upon hearing Lumian's instructions, he heaved a sigh of relief and jogged to the corridor, closing the vermilion door behind him.

Only then did Lumian gesture towards the scattered internal organs on the ground.

"Do you need me to roast it for you?"

Ludwig shot a quick glance at Lumian.

"Don't you find it irksome? These are all human organs."

Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.

"In my eyes, this is already on par with a monster's insides."

He then wore a self-deprecating expression.

"Moreover, isn't directly consuming Beyonder characteristics to advance a Beyonder equivalent to eating someone?"

Ludwig remained silent, taking a few steps to the side. He squatted down, picked up the old man's heart, stuffed it into his mouth, and began to chew.

Crimson blood slowly trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, patiently waiting for Ludwig to finish his meal and digest. After seven to eight minutes, Ludwig retrieved a white handkerchief from his coat pocket and wiped his mouth.

“These internal organs belong to different people. Some are Beyonders, some are ordinary folks, some old, some teenagers...”

“There are traces of human refinement. The aura of life is rather mixed and impure...”

“They will be controlled and influenced by the refiner...”

“Having been refined, the person doesn't know that he's been through this.

“He has complete memories of the past. This is something that can't be achieved by refining an ordinary body.

“He followed Enio on board, hoping to extract the remaining organs and complete the ritual before Enio reached his destination...”

Ludwig recounted the knowledge and memories he had absorbed in a straightforward tone.

Chapter 604 School of God's Descent

Under the glow of the crimson moon, Ludwig, clad in a two-piece pajama set and a small coat, recounted the memories and knowledge he had absorbed from the black-robed elder's half-charred brain and internal organs. He did so methodically, like an emotionless time-reporting machine.

“Only the brain belongs to him. His name is Prinpino.

“Due to his advanced age and weakened body, he delved into mysticism. Unwittingly, he drew the attention of the Great Mother and acquired a wealth of secret knowledge, evolving into a Beyonder...”

Upon hearing this, Lumian muttered with a mix of mockery and fear, Despite gaining the Great Mother's attention, did he not turn pregnant?

Are you truly a follower of the Great Mother?

Ludwig continued, “I'm uncertain when Prinpino started losing his internal organs. I failed to absorb the pertinent knowledge and memories.

“Similarly, the time he became a human refinement product remains unknown.

“His philosophy is:

“Humanity, once the favored and proudest children of the Great Mother, fell into folly, aging, and weakness due to their detachment from her.

“Only by allowing the divine son of the Great Mother to descend into the world can humanity be saved. They can enter Paramita and regain their original form.

“When the time arrives, the Great Mother will return to the real world she governs.”

Using the gender-oriented pronoun “she” to refer to the Great Mother instead of “She”... This implies that, in the eyes of individuals like Prinpino, pregnancy and childbirth are still feminine matters. A mother must be a “she”... This differs from the Nightstalkers... Lumian glanced at Ludwig and nodded approvingly.

Ludwig calmly detailed Prinpino's attempts and some of his abilities.

“The birth of the Child of God requires a specific body composed of various people's internal organs...”

“This isn't the entire descent ritual. It lacks a crucial component...”

“Prinpino possesses potent self-healing abilities. As a product of human refinement, he's immune to the influence of many Beyonder powers.

“He can indirectly control humans corrupted by the Child of God or specific Pathway Beyonders who have had direct contact with special patients. The range is 100 meters, and they must be unconscious...”

Upon hearing this, Lumian suddenly recalled a Sequence 7 Vampire of the Apothecary pathway.

Such Beyonders wielded formidable self-healing abilities and could craft Blood Slaves resembling their own marionettes!

Lumian refrained from interrupting Ludwig, patiently awaiting further details.

“He's adept in surgery and can directly heal others. He knows a ritual enabling a human to survive for a period even without internal organs.

“He can merge with trees and wooden articles for concealment, acquire a sturdy shell, and evade detection.

“He can stimulate the growth and reproduction of creatures, including but not limited to rats, fleas, bedbugs, fungi, and various plants. However, it drains his vitality. His vitality can be replenished through an unsuccessful Child of God descent ritual. Every nine rituals necessitate a batch of internal organs to be replaced...”

“He can also inflict curses upon others, summon malevolent creatures, consume his life for the casting of a few nefarious arts...”

As Ludwig concluded, Lumian realized Prinpino's Beyonder powers were diverse. He possessed partial Vampire abilities and embodied certain traits of the Earth pathway's Planter, Doctor, and other Sequences. Simultaneously, he wielded a limited grasp of dark arts, expending vitality for their execution.

It's akin to the amalgamation of the Apothecary, Planter, and Heretic Spellmaster pathways, yet it's not exhaustive... Such a boon exists? The Great Mother truly reigns at the apex of these three pathways... Lumian reflected momentarily before taking Ludwig's hand and departing the suite.

He instructed Lugano, stationed at the door, "Summon the priest from the prayer room and inform him of all pertinent details you are aware of."

After issuing his directive, Lumian deliberated before appending, "Locate the captain first, then seek out the priest."

"Alright," Lugano assented reflexively before inquiring, "And yourself?"

"Of course I'm going back to bed. Should they seek an audience with me, they may wait until tomorrow morning." Lumian gestured dismissively, guiding Ludwig along the dimly illuminated corridor to his suite.

Am I solely accountable? Lugano mused to himself.

He suddenly noticed he stood alone at the suite's threshold, surrounded by scattered internal organs. A shiver traversed his spine, prompting him to hasten toward the captain's quarters.

Ten minutes later, inside the black-robed old man's suite.

The priest named Montserrat and the captain, Pedro, scrutinized the situation while listening to Lugano's detailed account.

Nervously, Lugano disclosed to them that he was a Beyonder, a Doctor of the Planter pathway. Enio sought him out due to his exceptional skills in treating patients. Later, during the late night, he experienced a sleepwalking episode. When he reached the suite, he found his internal organs almost removed. Fortunately, he was rescued by his employer.

Throughout the entire narrative, Lugano only omitted Ludwig's consumption of blood, sharing everything else he knew.

Pedro, the captain with the handsome brown beard, quipped half-seriously,

"Could it be that your employer killed a passenger in this suite and deliberately scattered his internal organs everywhere, concocting such a sinister Warlock tale to deceive us?"

Uh... Lugano found himself momentarily speechless.

Indeed, this possibility couldn't be entirely dismissed!

Father Montserrat, garbed in a brown clergyman's attire, shook his head.

"After confirming Enio's physical condition, we'll determine the veracity of this story."

"I concur." Captain Pedro stroked his beard and gazed at Lugano. "What's your employer's name?"

"Louis Berry," Lugano truthfully replied.

“Louis Berry...” Pedro's eyes narrowed. “The adventurer who hunted down the Demon Warlock, Louis Berry?”

Montserrat's eyes widened slightly.

“The one collaborating with the Church in Port Santa to covertly thwart malevolent forces disrupting the sea prayer ritual, Adventurer Louis Berry?”

Wh... My boss' reputation is so renowned? Did the Church of Earth Mother inform all the clergy that Louis Berry is a friend and collaborator? Yes, this ship departed from Port Santa. The priest on board must have been the first to be informed... Lugano had considered it, but he hadn't expected his employer's name to be so impactful.

Without hesitation, he affirmed, “It's him, Adventurer Louis Berry.”

Just as Lugano concluded his account, the entire ship was abruptly sent airborne, landing atop a wave dozens of meters tall.

No dark clouds or torrential rain accompanied the phenomenon, and there were no violent winds or lightning.

After vaulting between the pitch-black waves several times, the steamship gently descended onto the sea's surface, restoring calm to its surroundings.

Captain Pedro surveyed the wrecked suite and the sliding windows, then turned to Lugano with a deep inquiry, “Is this the power of your employer? I heard stories of someone practicing sea wave magic at the bar tonight. Was that a genuine wave?”

“Yes.” Although Lugano was uncertain about the events unfolding, he attributed the display of nature's power to his employer.

He added, “He's extending his greeting.”

Captain Pedro and Father Montserrat fell into contemplative silence.

After more than ten seconds, Pedro addressed Father Montserrat, who seemed to be in his thirties, “Does the Church possess knowledge of such surgeries and rituals?”

Montserrat glanced at Lugano, indicating that the conversation need not be private.

The priest reflected for a moment before responding in a solemn tone, “There exists a faction of misguided Mother believers who contend that the decline of the modern world and the debasement of humanity result from their estrangement from the Mother.

“They are determined to employ any means to usher in the so-

called Child of God into the real world and invoke the Mother's descent through the return of the Child of God.

“We refer to them as the School of God's Descent.”

Unconvinced, Lugano inquired, “You can summon a Child of God simply by using the internal organs of ordinary people?”

While he lacked knowledge about the specific surgery and ritual, he could deduce that internal organs were a crucial component.

Montserrat contemplated the remaining human organs in the suite and responded gravely,

“The Child of God is the Mother's child, and humans are also Mother Goddess's children.”

Does this imply that, fundamentally, no one is superior or inferior, and they can serve as ingredients with quantity compensating for any shortcomings? Lugano grasped the essence of the priest's statement, realizing how many rituals involving blood sacrifices could be explained by this theory.

Father Montserrat offered no further explanation and turned to Lugano.

“Convey to your employer that we will take charge from here. Assure him not to worry.”

“Very well.” Lugano sighed with relief.

The next morning, Lumian woke up promptly and realized he no longer possessed the power of the sea, preventing him from tapping into the Governor of the Sea's authority.

He took a regretful sip of his light beer and commenced writing to Madam Magician, detailing the issues with the School of God's Descent and the purported birth of the Child of God in the spirit world.

Swiftly, the messenger returned, carrying Madam Magician's response:

“Encountering the School of God's Descent—I can't ascertain whether the issue lies with you or Lugano.

“The so-called Child of God has already been born in the spirit world—it's merely propaganda, you understand? Similar to the Church of The Fool's Holy Bible—just listen but don't take it seriously.

“Nevertheless, comparable incidents are unfolding, and they are brewing and evolving. This actually ties back to you. It originated from Cordu's empty cradle, the child Madame Pualis 'lost.'

“Additionally, based on various sources, Madame Night didn't perish in Fourth Epoch Trier. She encountered or acquired something that advanced the matter of the Child of God.

“Besides her, the Sinners' Voisin Sanson managed to escape Fourth Epoch Trier for unknown reasons. What he encountered remains unknown...

Voisin Sanson is still alive? Lumian was initially taken aback by the revelation in the middle of the letter, but a smile soon crept across his face.

At that moment, a knock echoed on his bedroom door.

“Who is it?” Lumian, aware that it was Lugano outside, asked casually.

Lugano replied fearfully through the wooden door, "I-I heard a baby crying again!"

Chapter 605 Lingering Effects

Hearing the cries of a baby again? Is he pestered by the so-called Child of God? Lumian held Madam Magician's reply, unfinished, and adjusted his sitting posture with amusement. He gazed at the door and said, "Come in."

Lugano turned the handle and cautiously pushed open the door, uncomfortably stopping in front of Lumian.

His actions and demeanor, combined with his thick eyebrows, large eyes, and square face, made him appear rather comical.

"Isn't that evil Warlock, the old man n-named Prinpino, already dead? Why can I still hear the cries of a baby?" Lugano inquired with concern, his tone reflecting it.

Having consulted the just-awakened Ludwig, he had received an answer that he hadn't heard the baby's cries.

Lumian playfully shook the letter in his hand and chuckled.

"There are two possibilities. One is that Prinpino's accomplices on the ship also possess the ritual to summon the Child of God. The other possibility is..."

Lugano pressed impatiently, "What is it?"

Lumian glanced at the Doctor and grinned.

"Perhaps the unborn Child of God has taken a liking to you and wants to choose you as his surrogate mother. Thus, even though Prinpino is already dead, he's unwilling to leave you and continues to linger by your side. Normally, he can't be seen or sensed."

Lugano's scalp tingled as he listened. Ignoring the question of why he was a mother and not a father, he stammered, "W-what should I do?"

"No rush." Lumian smiled.

"There's no need to hurry in such circumstances." Lugano felt like his internal organs might be devoured by the so-called Child of God at any moment, leaving only an empty cavity.

"Of course," Lumian said in a relaxed state. "Aren't you still alive? Since you're not dead, it means the situation isn't very serious. You can take it slow. There's no hurry."

That seems to be the case... Lugano, caught up in the conversation, nodded and asked in confusion, "Must I die before the problem becomes serious enough for it to become urgent?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "No, it means there's zero need to rush.

"If you're already dead, what's the hurry? Can I revive you?"

In short, there's no need to rush? Lugano was taken aback.

Though he harbored doubts, his employer's ability to crack jokes and play pranks reassured him.

Evidently, his employer didn't view the baby's cries as a grave concern!

Only then did Lumian unveil his true speculation.

“There's a third possibility. The corruption you suffered upon contact with Enio won't dissipate so quickly, and it's highly likely that it won't vanish naturally. Consequently, you'll still form a connection with the unborn Child of God.”

“Then, how do I eliminate the corruption?” Lugano accepted this explanation and believed that a solution existed.

Lumian didn't immediately respond to his question. He let Lugano stand in front of him as he perused the rest of Madam Magician's reply.

“Considering your link to the Child of God and the evil god's angel sealed within you, encountering a member of the School of God's Descent isn't a mere coincidence.

“However, your interpreter and guide are of the Planter pathway—that raises other issues. It's only natural for you to encounter matters connected to the Great Mother.

“As for the problem, ponder it and inquire within yourself. I won't spoon-feed you the answer. Conspirers need to employ their brains more...”

Observing this, Lumian looked up at Lugano without uttering a word. The Doctor's body tensed, and a thin layer of sweat trickled down his back.

“Is—is there any other problem?” Lugano stammered.

Lumian reclined in his chair and said contemplatively, “Clearing corruption is an entirely separate course in mysticism. I need to grasp the specifics before providing an answer.”

Having underscored the significance, he inquired, “Have you encountered similar situations before? Like peculiar infant cries, mystical occurrences linked to births, sorcery entwined with mothers, and so forth.”

Lugano dared not be careless, fearing that if the corruption wasn't rectified promptly, he might end up as an organless being.

He meticulously sifted through his experiences over the years. After a moment, he tentatively said, “There's something I'm not sure if it's relevant...”

It was clear that he was reluctant to discuss the matter.

“How am I supposed to know if it's relevant if you don't tell me?” Lumian didn't care about privacy.

After a brief pause, Lugano cleared his throat and said, “Didn't I mention that I became a Beyonder by obtaining a friend's relic?”

“Yes, did you murder that friend?” Lumian inquired deliberately.

Lugano hastily shook his head.

“No, he committed suicide.”

“Suicide?” Lumian raised his eyebrows, finding this matter intriguing.

Lugano finally gathered the courage and spilled it out in one go, “When I worked as a bounty hunter, I utilized the hidden mountain ranges in the Dariège mountain range for smuggling operations. I moved things back and forth, making a decent sum. I even aided some wanted criminals in escaping overseas. Tanko was one of them, but his escape wasn't from Intis to Feynapotter. Instead, he fled from Feynapotter to Intis.

“Eventually, he discovered a secluded valley deep within the mountain range and built a field of his own. He cultivated crops, tended to livestock, and kept to himself. I regularly visited, supplying him with essentials like salt, sugar, fabric, and other goods. In return, Tanko imparted mystic knowledge.

“I never imagined leading an ordinary life, with me out there adventuring and becoming a bounty hunter. Mysticism held a strong allure for me, and the teachings imparted by Tanko seemed invaluable at times.

“Tanko could be an enigma. Sometimes, he'd fall into brooding silence, his temper as hard and unyielding as stone, as if wrestling with inner demons. Other times, he'd be buoyant and loquacious, curious about everything around him.

“Every so often, he'd confess to straying from the Mother's teachings, descending into the depths of darkness. He'd lament how he drifted further from his true self, suffering the consequences. Occasionally, he'd voice suspicions about the Church, believing it to be deceptive, claiming the true Mother had departed long ago...”

In that moment, Lugano couldn't help but draw parallels between Tanko's cryptic musings and the philosophy of the School of God's Descent, as recounted by Father Montserrat.

Was this encounter a foreshadowing, planted in the past? Lugano drew in a deep breath, sensing an ominous shiver down his spine.

He rushed out his words.

“Last autumn, I revisited Tanko. We sipped his brew and discussed various things beyond the mountain.

“Out of the blue, he spilled that he couldn't endure his decadent, sinful self any longer. The demon lurking deep within him was gaining control. Tanko wanted to end his life before it consumed him entirely. His dying wish? I deliver his stuff to Torres, the capital of Gaia Province, and hand it over to a Church of Earth Mother clergyman, preferably a Blessed.

“I pretended to agree, talked him out of it, and thought he had abandoned the idea. But the next morning, I found him dead in the field where he'd harvested grain. Golden wheat ears sprouted from his body. And, get this, he had several female reproductive organs.

“I was freaked out. Felt like I was dealing with a monster.

“Now, for us bounty hunters, a dead monster is a good monster. It's material for a paycheck.

“Summoning courage, I went through Tanko's things. Found a golden blob, like a grain seed, but half the size of a fist, next to him.

“Based on Tanko's mystic know-how, I suspected this blob was the root of his Beyonder powers.

“After much internal wrestling, I debated whether to stick to our agreement and send this relic back to the Church. But in the end, greed got the better of me, and I devoured the blob.

“I'm a guilty man. Broke my promise. Hoping the Sun forgives me.”

Lumian listened in silence, a chuckle escaping his lips.

“You just ate it like that?”

Lugano grinned sheepishly and explained, “Yep, that's right. I only learned potion formulas after becoming a Beyonder and diving into mysticism. I didn't want a repeat of that experience, so I got obsessed with buying formulas.”

“You're lucky. A few years earlier, and surviving that would've been tough. We might've crossed paths in the Dariège mountain range, you as a monster and me as a monster hunter,” Lumian recalled President Gandalf's research and mocked Lugano.

Internally, Lumian muttered, Emperor Roselle was right. The ignorant are fearless... Something's obviously off with Tanko. He probably got tangled with the evil god's faith, corrupting the Beyonder characteristic he left behind. Eating it directly... no wonder you encountered the School of God's Descent and heard baby cries. Easy to be corrupted and influenced, encountering patients like Enio.

Uneasy, Lugano asked, “Was the Planter ingredient I consumed the root of the problem?”

He had ingested it a year prior, and even advanced. Was there no resolution to the problem?

Lumian, seemingly avoiding Lugano's beseeching gaze, feigned deep consideration as he perused the concluding segment of Madam Magician's response.

“I've pondered your earlier caution and have some theories, but presently, I cannot divulge them to you. I can only hint that Amon and the person behind Him must have

orchestrated something beforehand to divert the Celestial Worthy's attention from the pertinent issue.

“In essence, this situation seems advantageous for you and the rest of us. For now, it's best to feign ignorance and refrain from delving into it.

“If troubled by infantile cries, seek aid from a clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother.”

Wh... Did Madam Magician anticipate Lugano's lingering effects in advance? It seems so. She could discern the root cause of Lugano's plight... Lumian looked up, offering Lugano a reassuring smile.

“The remedy to purge the corruption lies in seeking aid from Father Montserrat.”

That's it? After all my exposition? If there's truly no alternative, I would've taken my chances with the priest... Lugano's lips twitched as he mustered a strained smile.

“Very well, thank you, sir.”

Chapter 606 Faith Conversion

At 8 a.m., in the prayer room on the third floor of the cabin, Lugano stepped in. Father Montserrat, draped in a brown priest's robe, was already preaching. Five or six individuals were scattered in the rows of chairs before the Sacred Emblem of Life.

Without disturbing the sanctified ambiance, Lugano chose a spot at the front, near a supplicant.

As Father Montserrat concluded his sermon and closed the Holy Bible, the supplicants rose, spread their feet, and raised their palms high, chanting in unison, “Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!”

Lugano instinctively turned his head, noticing a tightly-wrapped up supplicant with brown eyes and a pale complexion in the same row—Enio, the special patient who had lost his internal organs.

H-he's not dead? Wait, isn't the evil warlock, Prinpino, supposed to be dead? Why is Enio, the special patient, still alive? Lugano was stunned, almost convinced he'd encountered a ghost.

Being a Sequence 8 of the Planter pathway, he was ill-equipped to handle ghosts.

But then, Lugano observed that Enio's face wasn't as deathly pale as before. The brilliance in his eyes had returned, and vitality coursed through him.

Wh... Lugano raised his hand, tapping his glabella to activate his Spirit Vision.

He observed Enio's Ether Body, no longer as ashen as before. Whether it be the yellow hue symbolizing the digestive system, the orange hue denoting detoxification and organ excretion, or other shades, they had reverted to a semblance of normalcy, albeit faint and thin.

Is that even possible? Hadn't he lost his heart, liver, spleen, lungs, intestines, stomach, and kidneys? Lugano stared at Enio as though he were an aberration until Enio pivoted and pleasantly recognized him.

“Doctor, your treatment works wonders. I feel like I'm recovering!” Enio exclaimed joyously.

And this was just the initial treatment sans pinpointing the specific cause!

Lugano's lips twitched stiffly.

“That's reassuring, indeed.”

“Are you also a follower of Earth Mother?” Enio beamed, pleasantly surprised.

I'm not. Spare me the talk of Mother God or Mother... As an Intisian, how can I subscribe to the Earth Mother faith? Lugano gestured toward Montserrat, evading a direct response.

“I need to discuss matters with the priest.”

Enio nodded.

“When can I seek further treatment in the morning?”

You don't require treatment anymore. It's time for recuperation and repose... Lugano grumbled, forcing a smile.

“In about an hour.”

“Thank you, Doctor!” Enio waved, exiting the prayer room.

When only Lugano and Father Montserrat remained, Lugano hushed his voice, gesturing toward the door.

“H-how was he healed?”

Father Montserrat, still relatively youthful with sincere eyes, smiled and responded, “Thanks to Earth Mother, his fortune was favorable.

“As a Doctor yourself, you must be aware that internal organs can be transplanted as long as they maintain a certain level of vitality. For the ritual to succeed, Prinpino utilized his Beyonder powers to sustain the vitality of those internal organs.

Moreover, the set he employed was extracted from Enio, eliminating the need to consider transplant rejection effects.

“Furthermore, Enio remained alive, relying on mystical power to uphold a certain level of vitality. This was a crucial factor.”

“Did you perform surgery on him last night and transplant all his internal organs back?” Lugano was enlightened.

Father Montserrat nodded.

“For regular surgeons, this is an operation with nearly zero chances of success. Even if successful, keeping the patient alive long enough to navigate the most perilous stage is challenging. However, for us, it falls within our capabilities.”

Indeed... Compared to ordinary surgeons, Beyonder Doctors like us wield mystical powers akin to miracle-workers... Lugano sighed, dismissing further concern about Enio. Turning to Montserrat, he inquired with worry, "Father, I heard a baby crying again.

"Has that so-called Child of God set his sights on me?"

Father Montserrat reassured him, "Fear not. It's an inevitable repercussion of the corresponding corruption. It will gradually dissipate over time. If you're concerned about any unforeseen events or accidents on your path, I can help you eliminate them now."

Is that so? You're merely a Sequence 8 Doctor. Do you possess the capability to rid me of the remaining corruption? Set up an altar and seek Earth Mother's aid? Lugano remained skeptical.

"Thank you, Father!"

Montserrat gestured toward Lugano's previous spot.

"Follow the believers' example. Close your eyes, listen to my preaching, and simultaneously, pray to Earth Mother. Remember, it's specifically to Earth Mother, no other deity."

"Understood." Lugano resumed his seat, crossed his arms, and shut his eyes.

As Father Montserrat delivered his sermon, Lugano silently echoed the verses of the Holy Bible. Gradually, his thoughts blurred, and amidst the discourse, Lugano discerned a mother's gentle murmur and felt the comforting warmth of her embrace.

His tense heart eased, reminiscent of seeking solace in his mother's arms after childhood bullying.

It was a blend of dependency, reliance, and a sanctuary for the mind.

Unbeknownst to him, tears trickled down Lugano's cheeks, as if purifying his body and soul.

Slowly, his emotions settled, dispelling the fear and unease.

"Done." Father Montserrat's voice seemed to waft from the distance, reaching Lugano's ears.

Opening his eyes, Lugano raised his right hand, wiping away the tears.

Standing up, he lifted his hands.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

It was an almost reflexive response.

In that moment, sunlight streamed through the window, casting a faint golden glow upon the prayer room, as if heralding forthcoming abundance.

Father Montserrat nodded in satisfaction.

"Earth Mother has purged the corruption from your body. Tonight, pay attention and see if you still hear the baby's cries."

"Alright, Father!" Lugano replied, his body and mind now at ease.

The next morning, he awoke with a sense of happiness.

Throughout the night, he experienced no dreams of a beckoning mother, nor did he hear the cries of the so-called Child of God.

Filled with joy, Lugano, after serving Ludwig breakfast, hurried to the prayer room to share the uplifting news with Father Montserrat.

Father Montserrat gazed at him for a moment and asked with a smile, “Are you interested in embracing Mother Earth?”

“Me?” Lugano hesitated before inquiring, “Are you willing to accept the conversion of a heretic?”

Father Montserrat smiled and replied, “In the Mother's eyes, there are no heretics. There are only children who are or are not willing to return home.”

Lugano's heart wavered, reflecting on his past actions of merely going through the motions in cathedrals—praying, listening to preaching, and attending Mass. He hadn't truly believed in any deity, and the Church hadn't provided substantial assistance.

Moreover, if I truly become a believer in Earth Mother, I might gain access to subsequent potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients from the Church or the three Orders... Even if not, I'll surely receive corresponding mysticism guidance... Lugano hesitated, finding various excuses to convince himself.

Father Montserrat patiently waited, not pressuring him. He simply smiled, anticipating Lugano's decision.

Eventually, Lugano raised his hands.

“Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!”

He responded to Father Montserrat's proselytization in this manner.

Father Montserrat's smile broadened as he extended his arms.

“Welcome home.”

Those words oddly warmed Lugano's heart. It felt as though, after years of wandering and adventuring, he had finally returned home.

Fatigue lifted, and a sense of grounding enveloped him.

“Praise Mother Earth.” Lugano crossed his arms over his chest.

Father Montserrat nodded and commenced his true preaching.

“You believe in the source of life, the mother of all things, the propagation of the fertile land, the symbol of the crimson moon and reproduction, as well as the destination and the starting point of everything...”

Lugano listened attentively, committing the information to memory.

Though not devout yet, this might become his future sanctuary. He recognized the importance of presenting his good side at all times.

Upon returning to the first-class suite, Lugano glanced nervously at Lumian, who was engrossed in studying the Southern Continent's Dutanese, and stammered, "I-I've changed my faith to Earth Mother."

As a fellow Intisian, would he despise and scorn me?

Lumian looked up and chuckled.

"Then make sure to radiate maternal brilliance. Ludwig is counting on you for some fresh fish."

He doesn't mind at all... Lugano mumbled, not willing to let Ludwig go hungry. He embarked on a busy day.

Late at night, after tending to Ludwig until bedtime, Lugano pondered briefly and decided to visit the prayer room.

If the door was still ajar, he intended to offer a prayer before retiring for the night.

He had to make a good impression right from the beginning!

Lugano treaded the dimly lit stairs, approaching the prayer room with cautious steps on the creaking floor.

His footfalls grew hushed, wary of disturbing those engaged in prayer and potentially interrupting Father Montserrat's embodiment of Mother Earth's teachings through reproductive activities with a female believer.

Reaching the door quietly, Lugano extended his right hand, gently pushing it open.

The wooden door eased ajar, revealing a small gap without a sound.

It's not shut tight... Is he truly in the midst of reproduction? Lugano cautiously peered into the opening.

He observed the crimson moonlight enveloping the prayer room and Father Montserrat, draped in a brown priest's robe, standing before the Sacred Emblem of Life. Folding his arms, Father Montserrat swayed gently, as if cradling a newborn child.

However, there was nothing within his embrace.

Chapter 607 Smell of Food

Lugano's scalp tingled as he found himself in a surreal encounter with Father Montserrat, bathed in the glow of the crimson moonlight. The sight of the priest, cradling an invisible child in his arms, sent shivers down Lugano's spine.

Is he carrying a child?

An invisible child?

The so-called Child of God?

Frightened by the association, Lugano tried to quickly shut the door before the owner noticed, as if he had wandered into the wrong room. He slipped away without making a sound.

Suddenly, Father Montserrat's voice echoed in the air.

“Are you here for prayer?”

Lugano's eyes tightened, and like a startled wild cat, he swiftly turned and sprinted towards the staircase.

All he could think about at that moment was his formidable employer!

However, what met his eyes was utter darkness. No staircase with a wooden floor in sight.

In the shadows, clusters of pitch-black weeds, with plump wheat, swayed in eerie silence.

Lugano's body tensed, uncertain about the unknown that awaited him in this abyss of darkness.

“Why did you run?” The weeds parted, revealing Father Montserrat, holding an invisible baby. Behind him, an illusionary, unusually massive oak tree stood tall.

Next to the weeds, the oak tree was covered in abnormal growths, forming a chillingly simple and ominous Sacred Emblem of Life.

As Father Montserrat, clad in a brown priest's uniform, appeared less than three meters away, Lugano swallowed hard, offering a feeble excuse.

“It's late. I didn't want to disturb you.”

Father Montserrat remained cradling his arms, wearing a faint smile.

“What did you see?”

Every hair on Lugano's neck stood on end, and cold sweat broke out on his back.

Struggling, Lugano pointed at Father Montserrat's empty embrace, asking with difficulty, “Why are you doing this?”

Father Montserrat responded with a significant tone, “We're all Mother's children.”

Lugano didn't dare to delve further and nodded repeatedly.

“Yes, yes, yes. We're all Mother's children.”

Father Montserrat didn't allow him to navigate through with platitudes. He deliberately added,

“The child of the Great Mother.”

Great Mother... Although Lugano had anticipated this answer, his heart almost skipped a beat, and his mind went blank upon hearing it.

Seeing that Father Montserrat had made it explicit, Lugano had no choice but to inquire,

“Aren't... aren't you a follower of Earth Mother?”

Father Montserrat felt no remorse about betraying the Church of Earth Mother. He maintained a warm smile and explained, “Earth Mother is a facet of the Great Mother, a projection. In this role,

she watches over the lands of betrayal and the children who have strayed from the Mother's embrace.”

Gulp... Lugano instinctively swallowed, uncertain about how to counter Father Montserrat.

Having joined the Church of Earth Mother just a day ago and attended only two sermons, he lacked the profound theological knowledge to challenge such heretics.

He could, of course, outright deny it. After all, Montserrat's explanation sounded ominous. If the priest's words were true, with the Earth Mother Church's resources and factions, the so-called Child of God should have already been born in the real world, and the Great Mother would have returned. Yet, that hadn't happened.

The current scene and the invisible pressure silenced Lugano, refraining from outright denial.

What if he enraged Father Montserrat completely?

Father Montserrat continued, “All creatures in this world are the children of the Great Mother. Some were conceived by her, some are descendants of these deities, and some, like you and me, were directly transformed from the flesh and blood of the Great Mother. We share the strongest connection with her!”

Internally, Lugano couldn't help but retort, I was born by my mother, not transformed from the flesh and blood of the Great Mother... However, his smile remained, more grimacing than joyous.

“Don't you find the Great Mother's believers sinister and terrifying?”

Father Montserrat smiled and reassured, “There's no need to fear the return of the Great Mother. How can a mother hate her child?”

“You might not know, but there are many worlds beyond ours. The creatures in those places flourish under the watch of the Great Mother, constantly reproducing and growing. I've never heard of any species being eradicated. Instead, their numbers are increasing.

“Moreover, it's the Great Mother who granted us life. It's her prerogative to reclaim the life she bestowed upon us. We should cooperate willingly.”

Cooperate my rear end, you son of a sow! Lugano wasn't bewitched. Suddenly, he drew his concealed revolver and fired two shots at Father Montserrat.

Without confirming the effectiveness of the shots, he swiftly turned and sprinted toward the dark expanse filled with black weeds.

Though the destination within the dark depths was unknown, perhaps harboring great peril, staying here seemed even more hazardous!

“Waaa!”

Abruptly, Lugano heard an almost ethereal cry of an infant.

It was exactly the same as the sounds he had heard several times before.

Lugano's expression froze, and his pace slowed as he ran.

His eyes gradually filled with emptiness, and he turned around. Step by step, he approached Father Montserrat, who was cradling an invisible baby, and the illusory, colossal oak tree.

“That's our mother...

“The mother who gave us life...

“She's willing to accept anyone who repents, every child who returns home...

“If she wants to take back the life she bestowed upon us, then let her. She has the prerogative to reclaim what she gave...”

Listening to Father Montserrat's abnormally ethereal yet seemingly close voice, Lugano gradually developed a strong and heartfelt acceptance.

Yes, that's my mother...

Why would she harm me?

She can take back what she had given...

Lugano walked faster and faster until he stood beside Father Montserrat.

Instantly, he felt warmth and relief. It was the scent of a mother's embrace.

Gradually, he experienced an indescribable moist sensation, as if a kitten were being licked by a female cat.

How comforting... Lugano half-closed his eyes.

At that moment, he heard his mother's favorite nursery rhyme

—from behind him.

Why is Mom behind me? Shouldn't she be in front? Lugano wondered vaguely.

Then, he heard his mother shouting behind him, “Don't go over!

“Don't move forward!

“Danger!”

Don't go over... Don't move forward... Danger... Lugano shuddered, his vacant eyes regaining a certain vigor.

He saw where he was—the illusory colossal oak tree and moist, warm, squirming flesh petals sprouting from it. Half of his body was already enveloped in the flesh petals, slowly pulling inward.

This was the motherly embrace he had just experienced.

Lugano's pupils dilated, and a chill ran down his spine, causing his hair to stand on end.

He exerted strength against the viscous liquid-covered flesh with both hands, swiftly pulling away.

Father Montserrat, cradling an invisible baby, appeared beside Lugano, wearing a warm smile.

“Return. Return to the Mother's embrace and revert to our original form.”

Despair gripped Lugano.

He wanted to confront the priest, but sadly, having consumed two potions—Planter and Doctor—he realized that, apart from enhanced strength and proficiency with farming tools and a scalpel, he lacked Beyonder powers directly applicable in combat. These powers included predicting the weather, identifying and nurturing seeds, treating ailments, healing wounds, stitching up souls, bestowing life, or possessing outstanding surgical abilities.

In the past, Lugano had relied on the combat techniques and marksmanship learned as a bounty hunter to match a Planter's strength and firearms.

Nevertheless, not resisting at a moment like this meant certain death. Lugano, an adventurer with a history of killing, faced immense fear as he fired at Father Montserrat and drew a sharp scalpel.

In Lumian's first-class cabin suite, Lumian, still engrossed in the Dutanese textbook under the kerosene wall lamp, heard a knock on the door.

Perplexed, he stood up, opened the door, and found Ludwig.

Ludwig, clad in grayish-white checkered pajamas top and pants, spoke gravely,

“Lugano has encountered an accident. Hurry up and save him.”

An accident? Lumian arched his eyebrows.

Knowing that Lugano could still hear the baby's cries, Lumian had discreetly heightened his surveillance and attention on the servant, including just now.

But how could an accident occur when Lugano had entered the Earth Mother Church's prayer room?

Ludwig continued, “I couldn't sense his scent after he entered the prayer room.”

“What scent?” Lumian inquired casually, already forming a vague suspicion.

Ludwig responded nonchalantly, “The smell of food.”

Lumian stretched his neck and wrists, regarding Ludwig thoughtfully.

“You deliberately sniffed his scent.”

Ludwig's chubby cheeks displayed an expression that said, “What's so odd about that?”

“If he perishes and you're busy elsewhere, who will assist me in gathering food?”

“That's a valid point.” Lumian grinned.

In the darkness, enveloped by black weeds, Lugano's scalpel sliced through the air as he attempted to strike Father Montserrat.

“Waaa!”

The baby's cries echoed once more, leaving Lugano in a momentary daze, teetering on the edge of losing control.

With the invisible baby cradled in his arms, Montserrat manifested on the colossal illusory oak tree and smiled down at Lugano.

“Don't resist. We originated from the Mother, and we shall return to her.”

Just as the priest, with clear eyes and a warm smile, finished speaking, a knock on the door reverberated in the seemingly endless darkness, echoing among the weeds with abundant wheat.

Upon hearing the polite knock on the door, Lugano had an inexplicable thought.

How polite—to knock at the door in such a situation...

Chapter 608 The Way to Find Prey

The rhythmic thumping echoed only three times before escalating into a resounding bang.

As the sturdy wooden door flung open, the corridor bathed in the glow of kerosene wall lamps revealed a darkness entwined with overgrown weeds. Crimson flames surged forth, casting an eerie illumination.

In Lugano's gaze, the illusion of the oak tree abruptly dissipated, along with Father Montserrat, cradling an unseen infant in his arms.

Amidst the fiery chaos, the weeds withered, and the shadows dispersed. Lugano found himself “returned” to the humble prayer room, now aglow with the crimson moonlight.

Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, emerged at the entrance. His eyes scanned every nook, yet Father Montserrat remained elusive.

Powers akin to the Paramita world merged with other traits, albeit incapable of creating a sufficiently independent world separate from reality. It resembles Demon Warlock Burman gaining unique abilities through a forceful transition of pathways... Where is he hiding now? Drawing from Ludwig's knowledge from his food, Beyonders of the School of God's Descent can conceal themselves in woodwork. Although I can't confirm Father Montserrat's corrupted affiliation with the School, the influence of the Great Mother is evident... Lumian swiftly assessed the unfolding scenario.

The lack of resistance from Father Montserrat, who refrained from fleeing or hiding, didn't surprise Lumian.

Performing the wave magic in the ship's bar had been a casual display, not wanting to waste the temporary Governor of the Sea authority. However, the subsequent use of the colossal wave to “greet” Captain Pedro and Father Montserrat wasn't mere showmanship.

Unaware if the School of God's Descent incident had concluded or if hidden Great Mother devotees lingered on the ship, Lumian deliberately showcased the might of a demigod Governor of the Sea to instill fear!

If there were no other Great Mother adherents or lurking threats, his “greeting” actions could be seen as showmanship. But if danger lurked, it would make the elusive elements cautious, forcing them to retreat deeper into hiding. Lumian planned to let the ship reach the next port, leaving the Church of Earth Mother authorities to deal with them.

Father Montserrat, seemingly unwilling to face the adventurer Louis Berry head-on and his demigod prowess, opted for concealment, biding his time until the ship docked.

Had Lugano not luckily or unluckily stumbled upon the priest cradling the unseen infant, Father Montserrat might have continued portraying himself as a competent clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother, avoiding any confrontation with Louis Berry.

“F-Father Montserrat is a believer in the Great Mother! He was cradling an invisible baby!” Lugano hastily reported to Louis Berry, now realizing the gravity of the situation.

Cradling an invisible baby... He could be hiding within the ship's woodwork. Lumian scanned the surroundings, inspecting chairs, the floor, and the Sacred Emblem of Life adorning the wooden wall.

In an abrupt realization, he felt a stir in his heart as he approached the Sacred Emblem embodying Earth Mother.

Adorned with symbols of wheat, flowers, and spring water at the periphery, at its core lay a simple depiction of a baby.

A baby!

Advancing further, crimson flames radiated, setting the wooden floorboards and chairs ablaze.

Coming to a halt before the Sacred Emblem of Life, Lumian extended his right hand, gently caressing the baby's face.

The wood instantly deteriorated, exuding a yellowish pus.

It seemed that the depiction of a baby surrounded by wheat and flowers had long decayed, shedding tears of blood.

There's a huge problem with the Church of Earth Mother... Lumian narrowed his eyes.

While unable to pinpoint the elusive Father Montserrat, he unearthed decay and darkness lurking beneath the veneer of the Church of Earth Mother.

Observing the charred remains of the woodwork and finding no trace of Father Montserrat, with more wooden hiding spots on the steel steam ship, Lumian turned and addressed Lugano, “Take me to the captain's cabin.”

“Alright.” Lugano visibly relaxed.

Exiting the prayer room, the crimson flames within swiftly extinguished, ceasing their advance.

Inside the captain's cabin, Pedro, spotting a handsome brown beard, grimaced as adventurer Louis Berry approached.

Experienced as he was, he knew that there might be trouble on the ship.

During the School of God's Descent incident, Adventurer Louis Berry had only dispatched a servant to explain matters. Now, here he was personally visiting!

What did this signify?

It pointed to a more severe complication!

Without awaiting the captain's inquiry, Lumian calmly asserted, "Father Montserrat has succumbed, aligning himself with an evil deity. He likely colluded with the School of God's Descent's evil warlock."

Captain Pedro's mind jolted as if struck by a rod, momentarily buzzing and going blank.

After a brief pause, he cautiously inquired, "Have you already killed him?"

"Not yet," Lumian truthfully responded. "He escaped the prayer room and is now in hiding. Dispatch a telegram promptly, reporting this to the Church of Earth Mother and the Feynapotter government. My servant will provide the details."

In the face of Louis Berry's authoritative directive, Captain Pedro yielded without resistance. He shifted his attention to Lugano, absorbing the account of his conversion and Father Montserrat's description, cradling an invisible infant.

Upon hearing the revelation, Pedro wore a bitter expression and admitted, "I did sense something amiss with Father Montserrat, but I never anticipated it to be this grave."

"What's the issue?" Lumian inquired.

Pedro sighed, explaining, "He's a Favored, a Beyonder of the Earth pathway, the most orthodox clergyman. Typically, he needs a Blessed's help to conduct Mass, preach to believers, and guide others into the Church. However, he's the only Favored on this ship without a Blessed."

"I initially thought the shortage of staff in Port Santa was due to the sea prayer ritual, so I didn't pay much heed. But now, with Father Montserrat's fall..."

Only with the assistance of a Blessed can one conduct Mass and preach to believers. There's no Blessed following him... Lumian had previously learned that Favored of the Church of Earth Mother needs at least one second-in-command Blessed for their decisions to be considered valid. Otherwise, it risks being perceived as an influence of an evil god or a demon... An evil god... That Great Mother? Wh... Combined with recent events and his prior knowledge, Lumian suddenly grasped why the Church of Earth Mother maintained two distinct systems—

Blessed and Favored—rather than merging them.

Madam Magician of the Apprentice pathway had mentioned occasional influence from the Celestial Worthy, unsure if it was a revelation from Mr. Fool.

Similar to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings overseeing the Apprentice, Seer, and Marauder pathways, the Great Mother likely stood atop the Planter, Apothecary, and Villain pathways.

As a result, Favored Beyonders of the Planter and Apothecary pathways would also be under the influence of the Great Mother. The origin of the revelation, whether from Earth Mother or the Great Mother, remained unclear. Confirmation required the input of Blessed from pathways outside these two. Simultaneously, Blessed monitored the status of the Favored!

That explains it... Indeed, there's a profound and serious reason behind this seemingly absurd, wasteful, and unreasonable system design, Lumian concluded. Without further words, he instructed Captain Pedro, "Send the telegram."

After the captain relayed Father Montserrat's situation to the Feynapotter government and the Church of Earth Mother, Lumian contemplated how to locate Father Montserrat.

Considering the vast sea surrounding them, unless Father Montserrat possessed teleportation or exceptional underwater travel abilities, he could only be hiding somewhere on the ship.

Lumian dismissed the idea of involving his Major Arcana card holder for such a trivial issue and resolved to devise a solution himself.

Could I use the ship's megaphone to insult the Great Mother, provoking Father Montserrat to reveal himself? The challenge lies in the inability to lock onto a target, potentially yielding less-than-optimal results...

Burning all the ship's woodwork? Seems like a last resort due to the presence of valuable goods in wooden crates...

Borrowing a bottle of Prophetic Concoction from Franca? It requires a fresh corpse. Additionally, if Franca is involved, I could get her to directly employ Magic Mirror Divination...

Playing the Symphony of Hatred bone flute and informing passengers to cover their ears prior to that? But it only reduces damage without averting the effects...

Right, ask Ludwig if he recalls Father Montserrat's small...

Also... Yes, I can give it a try!

Lumian quickly came up with several solutions and decided to systematically test each one, reserving seeking help as a final option.

He bid farewell to the captain and, under the cover of night, led Lugano back to the first-class cabin suite.

"Do you recall Father Montserrat's scent?" Lumian inquired of Ludwig.

Ludwig shook his head.

"No direct contact."

"Fair enough." Lumian turned around, offering a reassuring smile to Lugano. "I have an experiment in mind. Work with me."

"What kind of experiment?" Lugano asked, a tremor of fear evident.

Lumian gestured towards the window.

"Go to the deck. It's more open there."

Uneasily, Lugano descended to the deck, bathed in the crimson moonlight. His employer pulled out a full-body silver armor from his Traveler's Bag, revealing an inscrutable smile.

Lumian recalled the Pride Armor's particular disdain for items from the Earth and Evernight pathways.

What if it wasn't an item but a Beyonder?

How would it react?

Could this hatred be harnessed to pinpoint Father Montserrat's location, given he was at least a Doctor, at a certain distance?

Lumian wasn't entirely sure, but he intended to experiment with Lugano, a fellow Beyonder of the Earth pathway, to explore the possibilities.

Chapter 609 Useful Armor

Lumian shot a quick smile at Lugano and fixed his gaze on the Pride Armor, carefully observing its reaction.

“What experiment? To test the effects of this armor?” Lugano questioned, a mix of apprehension and confusion in his voice.

As soon as he finished speaking, the air on the dark deck, bathed in the crimson moonlight, suddenly solidified.

In the next instant, the empty armor produced a radiant broadsword, and an unseen force locked onto Lugano.

Wh... Before Lugano could react, the silver-white full-body armor surged forward, the gleaming broadsword poised to strike.

In a split second, Lumian positioned himself in front of Lugano. His body expanded abruptly, almost tearing his linen shirt and black pants.

Bang!

Lumian's massive fist collided with the Sword of Dawn, creating a metallic clang that resonated through the air.

Only then did Lugano shake off his bewilderment. Though unsure why the empty armor attacked him, he instinctively turned and sprinted away.

After covering some ground, the Pride Armor halted and stood silently.

The Sword of Dawn, fashioned from light, dissipated, turning into beams of light that dispersed the crimson moonlight, casting a dawn-like ambiance upon the dark deck.

This sensation vanished in the blink of an eye.

Lumian, not daring to turn his back on the Pride Armor, repositioned himself and gauged the distance between the armor and Lugano.

About 20 meters... factoring in Lugano's running speed, the sensing range is approximately 15 meters... Lumian swiftly concluded. His body reverted to its original form, and a confident smile returned to his face.

It was enough. A fifteen-meter range sufficed on the ship!

He stowed away the Pride Armor and addressed Lugano, who was still making his way to the bow, “The experiment is over.”

Huh? Lugano came to a sudden halt, realizing that Lumian had already stashed the peculiar silver-white full-body armor back into the mystical item cleverly disguised as a coin bag.

Relieved, he jogged back, curiosity etched on his face as he inquired, “Did the experiment succeed?”

“Very successful,” Lumian replied, sporting a radiant smile.

Though Lugano didn't grasp the experiment's significance, he had a hunch that Lumian might be exploring a way to locate Father Montserrat.

Upon reaching the first-class suite, Lumian promptly instructed Lugano, “Go to the captain and ask him to gather all the Beyonders of the Earth pathway on the ship. Oh, and the Beyonders of the Apothecary pathway. I'll be back after capturing Father Montserrat. It doesn't matter if they don't show up. They'll bear the risk themselves.”

Unsure if Captain Pedro was aware of every unstable element on the ship and every Beyer, Lumian planned to monitor the Pride Armor later to prevent it from targeting hidden wild Beyonders. Allowing Pedro to handle this process first would lighten his load.

As Lugano left the suite, Lumian turned to Ludwig, who had resumed his meal.

“Keep an eye out later and see if there's any 'food' secretly lurking here.”

Ludwig, mouth full of cake, signaled his agreement.

Waiting for the captain's arrival, Lumian patrolled the cabin's top floor with the Pride Armor in his arms, but Father Montserrat remained elusive.

Before long, Pedro entered the suite with the suspected security supervisor and a passenger in a low hat.

Lumian didn't delve into details and gestured toward the sofa.

“Wait for me here.”

Without waiting for a response, he pressed down on his golden straw hat and exited the room.

Upon reaching the staircase, Lumian “pulled” out his silver-white full-body armor. Gripping the Sealed Artifact's armpits firmly with both hands, he methodically patrolled each level of the cabin.

Whenever he approached a distance less than 15 meters from his suite, Lumian exercised extra caution, yet the Pride Armor refrained from attacking anyone.

Could it be that, beyond five meters and with several layers of obstruction, the armor wouldn't exhibit any additional reactions? Lumian speculated as he descended floor by floor.

After nearly half an hour, he descended to the cargo cabin at the bottom.

Before maneuvering past stacks of wooden crates, the Pride Armor in Lumian's grasp suddenly quivered, breaking free from his control.

The silver-white full-body armor morphed a radiant broadsword. Advancing in two strides, it swung at a wooden box tucked in the corner.

With a resounding clang, the wooden box splintered, and a handful of steel ingots spilled out.

At the same moment, Montserrat's clean, youthful visage emerged from the broken box, materializing his entire body.

Confronted by the gleaming broadsword of light once more, the priest's initially sturdy frame bulked up, as if transforming into a formidable brown bear.

Bang! With a powerful palm strike, he sent the Sword of Dawn hurtling, landing atop a wooden crate of goods behind him.

This strength rivaled that of a true giant bear!

As Father Montserrat skillfully parried the Pride Armor's onslaught, Lumian, donned in a linen shirt, black vest, and a golden straw hat, materialized swiftly beside a stack of wooden crates behind him.

“Hmph!”

Two beams of white light shot from Lumian's nostrils, hitting Father Montserrat before he could even react.

Instantly, the priest's gaze lost focus, and he crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

With this turn of events, vitality surged through his body like a steam engine operating at full throttle.

The robust vitality manifested as an incredibly potent self-healing ability, swiftly restoring Father Montserrat's spirit.

The Spell of Harrumph bore a resemblance to Psychic Piercing, both targeting the Spirit Body and proving challenging to defend against. However, while the latter induced uncontrollable pain, trapping the target, the former added a sleep-inducing or unconscious state to the Spirit Body—a different form of harm.

Since it was an injury, it could be healed.

Empowered by the vigorous vitality's transformation, Father Montserrat's closed eyelids twitched as his eyeballs moved beneath them.

He nearly woke up before hitting the ground!

Yet, for Lumian, a mere second of restraint from the Spell of Harrumph was sufficient.

Considering that Father Montserrat might also be a product of human refinement, some abilities might not be effective. Lumian lunged at him, extending his right hand.

In his open palm, crimson flames coiled and compressed, forming a solid-looking sphere.

Simultaneously, the Pride Armor raised the Sword of Dawn once more.

Just as Father Montserrat opened his eyes and instinctively regained balance, he caught sight of Louis Berry's jade-green eyes, the dangerous crimson fireball almost white, and the broadsword of light slashing toward his head from the corner of his vision.

With only a moment to react, he twisted to the side to evade the Sword of Dawn, but Lumian pressed the crimson, nearly white fireball against him.

Boom!

In a resounding explosion, Father Montserrat was sent hurtling through the air.

Flesh and blood erupted from his right shoulder to his abdomen, bones fractured, and squirming internal organs were laid bare.

His right arm dangled, on the verge of detachment.

Yet, the robust vitality within Father Montserrat persisted. Flesh and blood wriggled within the gaping wound, miraculously healing.

Thud!

Father Montserrat crashed to the ground, accompanied by the heavy footsteps of the Pride Armor and the luminous slash of the broadsword.

Lifting his finger, the blood and flesh expelled from his body during the explosion swiftly coalesced, transforming into a blurry, thin blood-colored figure.

This figure lunged at the silver-white full-body armor, enveloping it and infiltrating its form.

Abruptly, the cargo hold was bathed in Sunrise Gleam. The blood-colored figure dissolved, gradually fading away.

The Sunrise Gleam was gentle, sparing Father Montserrat the instinctive need to shut his eyes. Consequently, his gaze reflected crimson, nearly white flaming ravens.

A dozen or so Fire Ravens circled Lumian, who casually kept one hand in his pocket. Their eyes fixed on Montserrat, tracing distinct trajectories as they soared.

Their aim was clear—to shred the target's body and set each piece of flesh ablaze, preventing recovery even with his potent self-healing abilities.

When each fragment was spaced 20 to 30 centimeters apart, their self-healing powers struggled to reunite them!

This wasn't flesh and blood magic!

Father Montserrat's pupils dilated, and his mouth instinctively opened, emitting a sinister yet intimate voice.

With the accompanying voice, a dense darkness descended, and wheat-filled weeds sprouted, devouring the Sunrise Gleam that bathed the warehouse.

In the darkness, some of the crimson, nearly white Fire Ravens lost their way, unable to traverse the “distant” space. Gradually, they dissipated—only a fraction successfully reaching Father Montserrat.

Amidst thunderous explosions, Father Montserrat's form turned translucent, giving rise to a colossal illusory oak tree in its place.

The oak tree stood unscathed amid the explosion and flames, and amidst the aftermath, the mangled form of Father Montserrat materialized on a branch adorned with mistletoe. He cradled his arms, as if holding an invisible infant.

Gazing at Lumian, he wore a genuine smile.

So you're not a demigod...

“Waaa!”

For the first time, Lumian heard the ethereal, hollow cry of the baby.

“Wah wah wah!”

Amidst the relentless cries, Lumian felt his vitality draining away. Gradually weakening, even his consciousness began to waver.

The depleted vitality seemed to flow towards the invisible baby in Father Montserrat's embrace, transforming into its nourishment.

Chapter 610 “New Life”

In the face of the infant's cries, which gradually weakened him, Lumian teleported immediately to Father Montserrat's side, launching a powerful attack to disrupt the impending impact.

Yet, in that very moment, he observed the Pride Armor freezing in place upon hearing the infant's cry. Suddenly, it crouched down and plunged the Sword of Dawn into the ground covered in dark weeds.

Dammit! Directly employing Hurricane of Light? Lumian's scalp tingled. Without bothering to confirm, he shifted the teleportation destination, vanishing into the darkness of the illusory oak tree, and reappeared on the ship's deck.

He had long recognized that Father Montserrat's weed wilderness was inferior to the Madames' Paramita. It failed to sever the deep connection between the inside and outside, nor could it prevent teleportation. Its sole capability was restraining various sounds and the aftermath of battle, akin to the Bottle of Fiction, if not less. Nonetheless, this wilderness had unique abilities.

As Lumian's figure faded into the dark wilderness, the Sword of Dawn embedded in the ground by the Pride Armor shattered, transforming into countless light fragments, creating a formidable storm that engulfed the area.

The plump wheat-filled weeds were sliced into pieces, leaving the ground barren.

Father Montserrat, perched on the oak branch, couldn't dodge in time. He only managed to manifest his body into something resembling wood before being consumed by the Hurricane of Light.

The illusory, hollow cry of a baby abruptly ceased.

When the Hurricane of Light subsided, Father Montserrat stood frozen in place.

In the next moment, his wood-like body, covered in brown bark, split open, revealing deep crevices.

Pa, pa, pa. Father Montserrat's body fell to the bottom of the oak tree, piece by piece. The incisions were smooth, and blood seeped out.

Flesh and blood were instantly absorbed by the illusory oak tree's roots, leaving nothing behind.

In the middle section of the oak tree, the bark split open. Squirring, moist flesh grew out, expanding into a hole.

A human head appeared, squeezed and ejected.

In the blink of an eye, the naked human was “born” by the illusory oak tree. It was Father Montserrat.

He retained his adult form, his body wet and partially covered in a dirty, translucent white membrane.

New life!

With the aid of the weed-covered darkness, the illusionary oak tree, and the invisible baby, Father Montserrat found a new lease of life!

His brow smoothed, and his eyes regained a youthful gleam. Enormous bat-like wings, shrouded in dark skin, erupted from his back, propelling him from the heart of the colossal oak to his silver-white full-body armor.

The Pride Armor rose, summoning light into its hand, forging a sharp spear.

Launching the elongated lance with relentless force, it sliced through the air, embedding into Father Montserrat's chest.

Father Montserrat's bat-like wings enveloped him, and his form shattered into palm-sized black bats.

In a mesmerizing dance, the bats circled behind the Pride Armor, reforming into Father Montserrat, adorned with a grimy membrane.

Father Montserrat's body expanded, morphing into a colossal bear. From his palms sprouted sharp claws etched with enigmatic patterns.

With a forceful swipe, he etched five deep gouges onto the Pride Armor's back, unveiling its hollow interior.

The Pride Armor froze, and the air itself seemed to still.

Before Father Montserrat could launch another assault, he noticed the silver-white full-body armor pivoting without warning.

Condensing hammers, axes, and flails made of light, it slashed at Father Montserrat frenziedly.

Father Montserrat lowered himself, shrinking to the cleared ground, inching towards the illusionary oak tree.

The ground beneath him caved, forming a rift.

In that moment, Lumian, sensing the end of the Hurricane of Light, teleported back into the darkness.

To his surprise, Father Montserrat stood unscathed, devoid of the brown priest's attire.

Undeterred, Lumian retrieved the Symphony of Hatred bone flute from his Traveler's Bag.

Seizing the moment while the Pride Armor entangled Father Montserrat, preventing the transmission of sound to the outside world, Lumian aimed to play a melody learned from Port Santa's various celebrations—composed by a Church of Earth Mother Saint for a bountiful harvest.

Typically, Lumian would don the Flog boxing gloves, “teleport” closer, stimulate some desire or emotion in Father Montserrat through a punch, and then play the Symphony of Hatred to trigger Flog's aftereffects. However, Lumian abandoned this well-practiced routine.

The peculiar illusionary oak tree on the battlefield gave him pause. Father Montserrat had carried an invisible baby, possibly a Child of God. Wearing the Flog boxing gloves could attract attention and danger.

If the Great Mother perceived it and allowed the Child of God to breach the illusory-reality barrier to confront him, the consequences would be dire!

Moreover, Lumian suspected that heretics like Montserrat harbored evident psychological issues, making their mental states unpredictable. Playing the Symphony of Hatred directly could exploit this vulnerability, much like how he and Mr. K detested hearing others play the Symphony of Hatred.

Uncertain about which weakness might be triggered or the ensuing changes, Lumian planned to roll with the uncertainties.

Just as Lumian raised the Symphony of Hatred to his lips, an eerie chill crawled down his spine.

“Waaa!”

The spectral baby's cries reverberated, mere inches from him.

“Hehe, hehe.”

The baby's cries morphed into laughter, as if engaged in an intriguing game with Lumian.

An inexplicable stiffness gripped Lumian, freezing him momentarily.

A cold aura infiltrated his body, spreading gradually to his abdomen.

As his life began to ebb away, merging with the cold aura, the baby in his ear oscillated between mournful wails and gleeful laughter.

Without hesitation, Lumian plunged his consciousness into his right hand, activating Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's residual brand.

A violent and frenzied aura erupted from Lumian, enlarging him without relying on his Compression strength. Tangible bloodlust filled the air.

The invisible baby's cries and laughter abruptly ceased, and the coldness invading Lumian's body dissipated under the searing sensation. The dark wilderness swayed, casting a faint glow.

Lumian, in control, terminated the activation and blew into the black bone flute with blood-colored holes.

A noticeably jubilant melody echoed, stunning Father Montserrat locked in battle with the Pride Armor.

His face twisted in indescribable agony.

Witnessing the silver armor wielding a staff of condensed light, Father Montserrat instinctively reached out, pointing at the adversary's feet.

Countless vines, weeds, and tree branches sprouted rapidly, entwining the Pride Armor and impeding its movements.

Amidst the cacophony of crashing branches and tearing vines, the Pride Armor advanced laboriously, slowed by the entanglement.

Father Montserrat locked eyes with Lumian and, in a pained plea, shouted,

“Run!

“The Child of God can't be killed!”

Run? Wh... Lumian realized Father Montserrat seemed more grounded than before. The warmth in his gaze, the familiarity of home, replaced by agony and conflict.

“Run!

“Repent to Mother Earth on my behalf!”

Father Montserrat screamed in hysteria.

His naked form underwent an abnormal transformation. Organs, symbolic of creation and incubation, sprouted under the translucent, filthy white membrane, intertwining in a horrific display.

Repent to Mother Earth? Lumian vaguely understood Father Montserrat's current state.

His corruption appeared incomplete, retaining a side that clung to faith in Earth Mother, resulting in a split personality. Typically, the normal persona remained suppressed by the corrupted one.

Is this the problem that the Symphony of Hatred triggered, allowing Father Montserrat's normal personality to temporarily gain an advantage and regain control of his body? Lumian sighed, but this didn't prevent him from condensing crimson fireballs that were nearly white, launching them towards the mutated Father Montserrat.

Montserrat's countenance shifted between frigidity and anguish. His body alternated between evasion and restraint.

With all his might, he exclaimed, “The Child of God cannot be killed, only banished!”

As Father Montserrat spoke, the crimson fireballs, nearly white, exploded upon him. The silver-white Pride Armor breached the obstruction of vines and branches, charging forward with a light-conjured staff.

Rumble!

Upon the fireball's detonation, the fallen Father Montserrat wrested control of his body, attempting to retreat underground.

In that instant, Lumian materialized behind him, brandishing the black bone flute.

Lumian teleported into the explosion's epicenter, unconcerned about the potentially severe injuries from the formidable shockwave!

The fireball was a decoy. The true lethal strike he primed was the Symphony of Hatred!

Pfft!

Lumian thrust the black bone flute with blood-colored holes into Father Montserrat's diminishing neck.

Rumble!

The expanding flames engulfed them both.