

Inevitability 701

Chapter 701 The Cheerful Franca

In Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca, dressed in a camel-colored cashmere coat, shivered and said to Lumian, “As soon as I have the money, I'm definitely renting a villa with underfloor heating!”

The concept of underfloor heating was proposed by Emperor Roselle. By laying metal pipes in the house during construction, boiling water could flow through them, providing summer-like warmth in confined spaces and keeping out the cold weather.

This was a must-have amenity for Trier's current upscale residences.

“Why would a Demoness like you be afraid of the cold?” Lumian scoffed.

He glanced at Jenna and noticed she was wearing a black cotton dress and dark makeup, as if portraying a Witch or Vampire in the little details of her daily life.

“I'm not a Pyromaniac. A Demoness's black flames have no temperature!” Franca retorted with a smile.

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Lumian casually settled onto the divan.

“Aren't Demonesses skilled with ice? Don't they have resistance to frost and cold?”

Franca reclined in her recliner, pulled up a cashmere blanket, and chuckled.

“I admit my performance just now was a little exaggerated, but Trier's winters really are cold. It's mainly because it's so humid. It's like being soaked in a semi-frozen lake.”

After the small talk, Franca sighed and said, “I've already obtained more information about Moran Avigny and the corresponding security detail. We can put the capture plan on the agenda. And you, my friend, are about to participate in the Dream Festival. Talk about a scheduling conflict.”

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he replied, “The Dream Festival is over.”

“Huh?” Franca and Jenna were taken aback.

Already?

Lumian recounted everything that had transpired during the Dream Festival, including Madam Magician's subsequent explanation.

Of course, as the name Farbauti couldn't be pronounced in any language, Lumian referred to it as the Devil Monarch and replaced Naboredisley with “the Demon with a long name.”

Franca's breathing quickened upon hearing that Lumian had donned a golden mask and spotted the suspected Underworld Daoist. Lumian's description of the Underworld Daoist's attire made her eyes light up like sunlight dancing on a lake.

Thankfully, her self-control was impressive. She endured until Lumian finished explaining the entire situation before asking anxiously, “Will there be another Dream Festival next year?”

“You want to participate in next year's Dream Festival and come into direct contact with the Underworld Daoist?” Lumian could guess Franca's thoughts.

Franca nodded emphatically.

“I believe that if the Underworld Daoist can bestow the Evernight pathway's power on Amandina, I, uh, a Demoness, shouldn't have any issues either. I wouldn't mind taking Him as my master!

“Don't worry. As long as I remain lucid, I won't unleash my bestial instincts during the Dream Festival.”

She teased herself.

Originally, you wanted to say that you're from the same homeland and not a Demoness, right? Lumian chuckled and said, “It's not impossible, but you have to become an Angel first.”

“...” Franca fell silent.

Jenna pondered and said, “There's something I don't understand. Isn't it the case that after obtaining the ability to stay lucid in the special dream, the corresponding dream projection will gradually dissipate? Why didn't Hisoka's?”

Lumian had already considered this question.

“Perhaps this is one of the reasons Hisoka had to leave Tizamo.

“The ability to stay lucid in the special dream shouldn't be permanent. Once you leave Tizamo, it will gradually fade. Therefore, Hisoka not only had to leave Tizamo, but also had to return two to three times a year for at least a week each time to maintain the existence of the dream projection.”

After discussing the Dream Festival, Franca briefly recounted the information she had obtained from 007 the previous night.

“Moran Avigny's family has a long history. Members span the military, political, artistic, and business worlds. Combined with the information Madam Judgment gave us, I suspect this is a branch of the Tamara family. Their dark-gray eyes are one of the defining characteristics of the Tamara bloodline!

“Of course, not everyone with dark-gray eyes belongs to the Tamara family. It's more that members of the family are likely to have dark-gray eyes.

“Based on the close connection between a large branch of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect, it's very likely that Demoness of Black Clarice also shares the Tamara family's bloodline.

“Following my hypothesis, the Demoness of Black might be a mixed-blood descendant of the Sauron family who pledged allegiance to the Demoness Sect and the Tamara family.”

This was the only explanation for Demoness of Black Clarice's reaction when she heard about the Sauron family. It was also the only explanation for her indulging Browns Sauron!

Lumian didn't interrupt as Franca continued, “We need to face not only Moran Avigny but also the hidden Tamara family and the Mirror People faction. Moran Avigny might possess powerful Beyonder powers himself. Furthermore, Bureau 8, Purifiers, and Machinery Hivemind rotate daily, with a regular Beyonder team providing protection.

“What my friend means is that if we're unafraid of sacrifice, there's still a chance of assassinating Moran Avigny. However, capturing him alive or channeling his spirit is very difficult and dangerous.”

What 007 truly meant was that the Purifiers wouldn't go easy on us or provide overt assistance. However, if Moran Avigny's true nature as a Mirror Person is exposed after his death, 007 would find a way to allow us—the captured assassins—an opportunity to escape, just like when Jenna killed Hugues Artois. However, if we didn't want to obtain more information about the Mirror People through Moran Avigny, wouldn't it be better to inform the authorities and let them handle the arrest? Lumian pondered for a moment and said to Franca, “Let's not rush into a plan. We'll discuss it tomorrow.”

“Why wait until tomorrow?” Franca asked, holding the stack of papers 007 had given her.

Lumian chuckled.

“After I find a safe place to complete my advancement and become a Fate Appropriator, perhaps a special, mixed ability related to fate will appear. That might help us obtain new ideas and come up with more effective solutions.”

In the current four-person team, it was no secret that Lumian possessed the power of the Inevitability pathway.

Franca blurted out in surprise, “You can obtain a new boon so quickly?”

“Didn't I just mention it?” Lumian smiled. “I culled nearly 20 Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 bestowed in one go, significantly digesting the potion.”

Franca pursed her lips and signaled to Lumian with her eyes: Look, look into my eyes! They're filled with jealousy!

Lumian turned to Anthony and asked, “What did you mean by genuine identity?”

Anthony, who had been listening quietly and was on the verge of being forgotten, explained simply, “Actually, it was a hint from Madam Justice. That identity is very strange. His background, education, and experiences are all real, but there's actually no such person. And the people who might expose this are either long dead or out of town, the kind who won't return for years.”

Franca made a judgment based on her experience. "It seems it was meticulously crafted years in advance as a disguise."

Since they weren't discussing a plan to deal with Moran Avigny today, Anthony didn't stay long. He had to prepare for tonight's banquet.

"Where do you plan to advance to Fate Appropriator?" Jenna asked Lumian. "The sacrificial square in the catacombs?"

It belonged to two orthodox gods and could protect advancers from additional interference.

"I'm afraid I'll trigger a taboo and be purified by sunlight," Lumian dismissed the suggestion with amusement. "Advancing to Conspirer is different from advancing to Fate Appropriator."

One belonged to the pathways of the divine, while the other belonged to an evil god's domain!

Lumian had already decided on a location to advance.

It was the Nation of the Evernight!

Termiboros's well-behaved nature kept Lumian concerned that He was waiting for an opportunity to stir up trouble. And as a Fate Appropriator began to involve core abilities in the Inevitability domain, it was very likely that Termiboros would tamper at this Sequence.

Therefore, Lumian had to be cautious. He planned to advance in a safe place that could eliminate many external influences.

Among them, the Nation of the Evernight was the best choice. Furthermore, Lumian had planned to contact Hela in the next two days to share information about the Underworld Daoist and the Dream Festival.

Franca looked at Lumian in enlightenment. "You want to advance at our mysticism gathering?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded slightly.

Franca, who was in a good mood, took the initiative to help. "I'll help you write the letter!"

After she entered the bedroom and closed the door, Lumian looked at Jenna and said, "You're very quiet today."

Jenna smiled. "An excellent theater actress must know how to act like a lady."

Lumian glanced at Franca's door.

"Madame Red Boots seems to be in high spirits today. She's cracking jokes left and right."

"It's true she's been in a good mood recently," Jenna replied truthfully.

Lumian nodded thoughtfully and didn't probe further.

Jenna's lips curled into a smile. "Why don't you keep asking?"

Lumian leaned back on the sofa and laughed self-

deprecatingly.

“My sister once taught me that there's no need to inquire too deeply about certain matters. If I know too much, I might regret it. I might even have to face problems I'm unwilling to face.”

Jenna listened attentively, placed her hand on her cheek, and asked with a smile, “What are you afraid of?”

Lumian strategically took a sip of black tea and said, “It's not fear; it's respect.”

Jenna gazed at him and suddenly laughed.

She didn't press further and chatted with Lumian about the details of Tizamo.

Before long, Franca opened the door and exclaimed with a smile, “It's on for tonight!”

At 10 p.m., in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian and Franca swiftly materialized, and Hela was already waiting.

Chapter 702 Fate Appropriator

Before Lumian had a chance to say anything, Franca eagerly recounted the events involving the Underworld Daoist during the Dream Festival.

She said excitedly, “The interaction between our two worlds is even more intricate than I had imagined!”

“Who would have thought there was another point of interaction beyond the Samaritan Women's Spring, and it's all tied to that mysterious illusory river.”

Silently, Franca mused, It's a shame we still haven't located the man believed to be from our world who was seen on the fourth level of the catacombs... Seriously, what's taking 007, no—the Eternal Blazing Sun Church so long? They haven't even tracked down the traitor who worked with April Fool's...

Once Franca had finished speaking, Lumian provided a concise explanation of the origins of the black ancient tomb and the ancient corpse.

Hela, still in her black widow attire, listened intently, gently nodding her head.

“It's now evident that the illusory river isn't a reference to the River Styx. It must be something far more significant than that.”

“Absolutely.” Lumian wasn't caught off guard by Hela's statement. “The black ancient tomb doesn't just embody the power of the Death pathway; it also represents the Evernight and Warrior pathways.”

In the current world, all the legends surrounding the River Styx were connected to death.

Lumian speculated that this might involve beings such as the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, the Mother Tree of Desire, and the Great Mother, who held multiple thrones linked to various pathways.

Hela glanced at Franca, falling silent for a moment before speaking.

“If the Armored Shadow is right, the Underworld Daoist is in a precarious state. If you intend to interact with Him, you must exercise extreme caution and ensure you have an escape route from the corresponding area.”

The Armored Shadow had described the Underworld Daoist as having “sacrificed himself to enter the river,” implying the sacrifice of one's physical form or life.

“I understand.” Franca let out a sigh. “I'll give this matter more thought once I reach Sequence 5.”

As she sighed, a smug thought crossed her mind, The Pleasure potion has been largely digested lately. Even without additional opportunities, I can start preparing for the Demoness of Affliction's advancement ritual within two to three months... I need to begin gathering the necessary potion ingredients now...

I can't mention it, I mustn't mention it—I can't let Lumian know. Bragging would make me seem crass and disrespectful to Jenna...

Lumian's curious gaze alternated between Hela and Franca a couple of times.

He sensed that Madame Hela had something crucial to tell Franca but refrained from doing so.

It was rare for Lumian to perceive Madame Hela as having something on her mind. Her glance at Franca and few seconds of silence gave him the impression of hesitancy.

Regrettably, Franca often has a carefree nature and doesn't pay much attention to details. Otherwise, she might be able to extract some information from her through direct questioning... Lumian's mind raced, and he concluded that if Madame Hela chose not to say anything at this point, she must have her reasons. Thus, he suppressed his curiosity and gestured towards the front of the dilapidated palace.

“I'll get the ritual ready.”

“Sounds good,” Franca responded with enthusiasm.

While she had witnessed Lumian acquire Ascetic powers, that had taken place in Fourth Epoch Trier. A myriad of dangers had intertwined, causing her to shudder with fear. She had to maintain constant vigilance of her surroundings, unable to “appreciate” the situation with the same level of ease as she could now.

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian retrieved a metal canister from a hidden pocket and tossed it to Franca.

“If things start going poorly for me later on, forcefully break through the wall of spirituality and throw this in front of me or on me.”

“Should I unscrew the cap for you?” Franca asked, a smile playing on her lips.

“What do you think?” Lumian arched an eyebrow.

“Naturally,” Franca replied, her smile unwavering. “I'm just trying to lighten the mood. I want you to feel at ease.”

“I appreciate it!” Lumian turned and made his way to the massive stone chair in the depths of the ancient palace.

His intuition suggested that the huge, mottled stone chair might have a connection to Mr. Fool.

This would enable him to draw Mr. Fool's attention during the impending ritual.

As Franca and Hela watched Lumian arrange the corresponding items on the stone chair, setting it up as an altar and placing a Loen gold pound reverently in front of the grayish-white candle symbolizing the deity, Hela calmly remarked, “Don't be concerned about not receiving a response. The secrets will remain secret, while the rest will be revealed.”

Lumian felt himself relax as he consecrated the ritual silver dagger, erecting a wall of spirituality.

The voices of Franca and Hela faded into the background, as if emanating from a great distance.

Rather than rushing into the ritual, Lumian lowered his voice and proactively provoked Termiboros.

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“I'm about to extract your power once more. Any thoughts on the matter?”

He aimed to enrage Termiboros to a certain degree. Only then might Termiboros inadvertently expose any concealed issues in His response, allowing Lumian to discern whether this Inevitability Angel was secretly plotting something.

The sooner he uncovered it, the sooner he could address it and find a resolution!

Termiboros's imposing voice resonated.

“The further you venture, the closer you draw to the end. This is an inevitability—irreversible.”

“Is that how you console yourself?” Lumian scoffed at Termiboros's enigmatic behavior.

Termiboros's voice reverberated within Lumian's body.

“Boons bring the recipient closer to the bestower. You may believe you're extracting my power, but in truth, you're steadily aligning your fate with mine, becoming more and more like me.

“This grants me glimpses through your eyes and your fate.

“You and I are merely bugs ensnared by fate. Apart from the greatest of existences, all living beings share this commonality.

“In the near future, you will come to understand: “Death is the end of all things, and madness is an eternal melody.”

That's essentially the same as saying nothing... Is Termiboros implying that I will face a setback in the near future? Lumian chuckled and said, “Are you deliberately saying this to make me obtain the power of a Fate Appropriator while burdened with worry and fear, hoping I'll die here?”

“Don't concern yourself. Death and madness won't deter me.”

Without awaiting Termiboros's reply, Lumian fixed his gaze upon the candle flame and recited in a deep, resonant voice, “Power of Inevitability!

“You are the past, the present, and the future;

“You are the cause, the effect, and the process;

“...”

As the ritual progressed, Franca and Hela bore witness to the transformation of all the items on the altar. Stones softened, candles expanded, and the ground decayed into a swamp. Countless strange insects loomed in the void.

The darkness outside the dilapidated palace intensified. A silver-black liquid flowed from Lumian's chest, enveloping him like corrupted mercury.

Lumian writhed in agony. Throughout this process, his body alternated between contortion and normalcy, occasionally assuming postures that defied human anatomy. It was as though he were boneless, his skin and flesh infused with mercury.

Franca was startled and experienced an inexplicable, illusory pain.

Amidst the excruciating and familiar pain, Lumian caught sight of Aurore.

Aurore, with her thick, long blond hair, was attempting the Soul Summoning Spell!

Lumian stepped forward and intervened, stopping Aurore.

Just as he rejoiced in the belief that the problem had been nipped in the bud and Aurore wouldn't fracture into the evil personality of Roche Louise Sanson, he was horrified to discover that Aurore's body had undergone a drastic transformation. In a bloody state, she had expanded into a monster with three heads and six arms, sitting cross-legged.

Lumian witnessed Aurore seeking assistance from Hela. Reluctantly, he offered his help, preventing his sister from forgetting this matter. However, when Hela arrived, Aurore had already transformed into a colossal three-headed, six-armed monster, despite the final ritual not having been performed.

Aurore, at various stages of life, appeared before Lumian. They were on the verge of making pivotal choices.

Lumian desperately tried to alter the Aurores' fates and prevent them from descending into the abyss. However, each time, although he managed to redirect fate to another tributary, Aurore's spirit and flesh ultimately crumbled, transforming her into a three-headed, six-armed monster.

Is this inevitability? Is this an irreversible outcome? Lumian's eyes turned bloodshot as he made increasingly futile efforts.

At that instant, he caught a whiff of an elegant and sweet scent, and a soothing chant echoed in his ears.

Lumian quickly regained his senses and clarity of mind.

The Aurores before him abruptly vanished, leaving only the quietly burning candle flames.

Instinctively, Lumian glanced behind him and realized that Franca and Hela were nearby. The wall of spirituality had been shattered.

Simultaneously, Franca observed the flickering silver and iron-

black colors in Lumian's eyes before they merged and settled into a silvery-black hue.

Lumian exhaled, recognizing that he had evaded danger and successfully acquired the power of a Fate Appropriator.

Yet, a profound sense of frustration and disappointment lingered within him.

What he had just experienced in the illusion seemed to foretell the ultimate outcome of his desire to resurrect Aurore.

After ten to twenty seconds, Lumian finally broke free from those emotions and regained his determination.

How could anyone give up without even trying!

Franca breathed a sigh of relief, screwed the cap back on, and asked with a smile, “How did it go? Any new abilities?”

You really don't consider yourself an outsider. How can you nonchalantly inquire about someone's new Beyonder powers? Lumian silently criticized Franca as he meticulously observed his transformation.

His eyes, which had just returned to normal, once again turned silvery-black, reflecting the images of Franca and Hela.

Then, he perceived the mercury-colored illusory river that corresponded to the two ladies. He saw the sparkling light representing their past and present river trunks and the numerous tributaries that had branched off from the present.

The illusory river slowly advanced, devouring all the tributaries, leaving only one behind, transforming it into the main bulk. The main bulk continued to split into new tributaries...

Lumian noticed that one of the tributaries, regardless of whether it belonged to Franca or Hela, emitted a faint black hue.

Chapter 703: Fused Ability

Black... When it comes to luck, this color signifies they'll face a deadly calamity... If the hue isn't dense, could it mean the calamity is potentially fatal but avoidable—that there's a chance of overcoming it? Yes, I'll watch others going forward. I might spot dense black. Maybe that implies

if the corresponding tributary is selected, a deadly fate is sealed... Lumian continued observing Franca and Hela's fates, forming a related hypothesis.

Since the tributaries constantly shifted, Lumian couldn't fully grasp a target's future fate. Fie could only catch glimpses of a few possibilities. The black "mark" let him pinpoint the critical junctures.

This wasn't covered in the mystical knowledge accompanying a Fate Appropriator's power. Lumian strongly suspected that once Luck Observation evolved into Fate Observation, it could merge with a Reaper's Weakness Investigation to create this unique ability.

It was like exposing a target's physical and spiritual weak points—the tributary leading to their demise!

As 1 suspected, the Hunter and Inevitability pathways' visual abilities have combined... Lumian used the chance to examine Hela and Franca's fate rivers, realizing he could perceive fragments of their past and present destinies, similar to when he used Fallen Mercury to discern others' fates.

The difference now was that he could see it directly, without extending his spirituality. With the right abilities, he could touch the ethereal river that shimmered with mercury-like ripples, woven from intricate symbols.

Put another way, he could "see" part of a target's fate without their awareness.

Naturally, compared to touching the corresponding fate river through abilities, there were clear limits to relying on eyesight. Most life scenes in the mercury river were quite hazy in such cases. The nearer to the present, the sharper they became. Likewise, the less they involved high-level matters, the clearer they appeared.

Franca and Hela's life scenes presented a vivid, striking contrast in this regard.

Past and present fragments manifesting in Hela's fate river's mercury ripples seemed veiled in fog, while others appeared cloaked in night, making them indiscernible. Only a handful could be perceived. Franca's was far clearer. Especially in the last week or two, Lumian could see everything except scenes with high-level entities like the Evernight Nation, Madam Judgment, and the Demoness of Black.

During his exploratory observation, Lumian was abruptly startled.

After a few seconds, he looked away, unsettled.

"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, curious and concerned. "If you prefer not to disclose your specific abilities, that's fine."

Only then did she realize she had been too eager to ask about the Fate Appropriator's situation and potential abilities in front of Madame Hela.

Lumian couldn't help swallowing hard. Composing himself, he met Hela's gaze.

"There's nothing 1 can't share.

"I can no longer just observe luck. I can directly perceive the fate river corresponding to each of you. It ranges from the main course to the tributaries, but most is

indistinct. I can only clearly detect it when actively using my fate-hunting ability, and there's a time constraint.

“Indeed, among the fate river tributaries I saw, one likely leads to death...”

Lumian succinctly recounted his initial theory, the hue of his eyes gradually normalizing.

“If death isn't inevitable, it should be termed a death calamity,” Franca remarked, focusing on the symbolic import of “black.”

Death calamity? Lumian and Hela turned to Franca, awaiting clarification.

Franca laughed self-consciously.

“Simply put, if you navigate a catastrophe, crisis, or incident that could cause death, you might emerge alive.”

I see... Lumian considered briefly before saying, “Then I'll dub this ability the Eye of Calamity—eyes that can perceive death calamities.”

The name mattered little to him. Its utility was paramount.

Lumian then absorbed the mystical knowledge that had entered his body along with a Fate Appropriator's power.

A Fate Appropriator's core actually lay in fate appropriation, split into three abilities.

The first was Fate Appropriation. By touching the target's fate river, he could appropriate and extract the desired fate.

This differed somewhat from Fallen Mercury's abilities. One needn't kill the target to appropriate their fate, but it required time. The less weighty the corresponding fate, the quicker the process, and vice-versa.

A fate fragment's weightiness denoted its significance to the target's overall fate.

Naturally, Lumian could also appropriate a fragment of the target's fate by slaying them. Moreover, the target's overall fate would be locked without further changes. The time to complete the appropriation was very brief.

As a Fate Appropriator, Lumian could compress two fate fragments within himself, surpassing Fallen Mercury's single one.

Usually, there could be three, but Lumian hadn't been a Dancer or acted as an Alms Monk. He hadn't even signed a full set of special contracts. Meaning, during the Inevitability domain's initial trio of stages, he had seldom neared the power bestower in daily life. The fusion with the powers was comparatively weak.

Had he not cultivated an Ascetic's core spirit, perhaps he could have stored merely one fate fragment.

The second ability was Fate Exchange, where one's accrued fate was traded for a specific fate of the target.

Ideally, the fate fragments' weightiness should match. Light for light, heavy for heavy. If not, the exchange would be quite slow, maybe taking five to six minutes.

The fate fragment's importance was one facet, while its importance to the individual was another. Together, they would influence the exchange speed. Still, generally, it was swifter than directly Appropriating the corresponding fate—barring Appropriating from a slain target.

Be it Fate Appropriation or Fate Exchange, there were limits barring him from attacking targets until he finished them.

In this respect, it lacked Fallen Mercury's convenience and flexibility.

The third ability was Compelling Fate. It entailed expending an enormous amount of spirituality to directly compel the target's future toward a tributary.

Originally, this ability didn't function this way. It primarily swayed the target's future fate via rituals, curses, and other means. Yet, after fusing with the Reaper trait, it could directly compel fates.

This combination with the Eye of Calamity allowed Lumian to discern certain possibilities.

Naturally, after careful assessment, he deduced his dual spirituality as a Reaper and Fate Appropriator could only permit two compulsions.

A Fate Appropriator's core abilities are the deepening and streamlining of the Luck Transference Spell... Lumian gave an overall appraisal.

Upon becoming a Fate Appropriator, the ceiling of contracts he could withstand as a Contractee had hit twelve. The endurance stemming from being an Ascetic had also risen markedly.

This spurred Lumian to mull signing two to three more contractual abilities down the line to diversify his combat style and bolster his related trump cards.

However, he wouldn't truly sign all twelve, not even ten. That would surpass an Ascetic's endurance. Lumian had no wish to become a pseudo-inferior Beyonder like Padre Guillaume Benet, whose weaknesses could be readily grasped and actions predicted.

Another notable shift in an Ascetic was the accumulation of external fate fragments. It had genuinely become a vital component of a Fate Appropriator. As for rituals such as the Animal Creation Spell, they could be streamlined. For instance, Lumian previously had to drape the target with a ritual sheepskin to transform them into sheep by chanting the incantation. Now, he could use a more symbolic sheepskin to cover the other party to meet the prerequisite.

His flexibility as a Dancer had also grown. Lumian could now perform horrific and incredible actions. If ordinary folk merely glimpsed the corresponding shadows he cast, they would deem him a monster.

Furthermore, Lumian's spirituality had climbed substantially. The most basic yardstick was that he could employ up to 17 Spirit World Traversals.

Nonetheless, both a Fate Appropriator and a Reaper had scant impact on his physical prowess.

After verifying his transformation, Lumian thanked Madame Hela and asked when the next Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society meeting would be before returning to the real world with Franca.

Having returned The Fool's gold coin to Jenna, Lumian briefly outlined a Fate Appropriator's abilities and stated,

“Given my ability to directly perceive some fate fragments, i'll settle on the concrete plan after observing Moran Avigny up close.”

“Okay.” Franca thoroughly endorsed any step that could lessen the risk.

Lumian rose and said to Franca and Jenna,

“I'll head out first then. Don't forget to help me inquire at your mysticism gatherings if there's the Harvest Priest potion formula and the matching Beyond ingredients.”

“Got it.” Seeing Lumian off, Franca turned to Jenna, puzzled. “Why is he acting a bit odd? Doesn't he usually rile people up and quip before leaving?”

Jenna also found this atypical and sank into deep thought.

Abruptly, her expression changed.

Jenna glanced down at the book in her hand, saying pensively, “Perhaps he just received the boon's power and isn't in a stable state. He needs to hurry back and rest.”

Franca nodded, understanding. “Fair point.”

She didn't linger on it or bother to. The night was lovely, and she couldn't squander it on such trivial matters.

Avenue du Boulevard, outside the Champs-Elysees' Rose Conference Room.

Numerous reporters stood before the hotel's signature indoor golden fountain, awaiting the arrival of Minister of Industry Moran Avigny, who had finished negotiations with the Loen Kingdom's delegation.

Lumian had switched into a pre-prepared black tweed coat and half top hat. He held a rented, new black-and-white camera without a tripod. With his unremarkable, passerby-like appearance, he mingled with these individuals as a fake reporter..

Chapter 704 Fragment of Fate

The reporters waiting outside the conference hall displayed no signs of impatience or dissatisfaction, despite the passing time. They were well accustomed to such situations.

At last, the heavy doors of the Rose Conference Hall opened, revealing the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny. Dressed in a sharp formal suit, his dark-gray eyes and chiseled features stood out as he emerged alongside the leader of the Loen Kingdom's delegation.

Snap! Snap! A flurry of loud camera flashes illuminated the scene, and Moran Avigny responded with a graceful wave to the reporters.

Lumian refrained from pushing his way to the front, choosing instead to observe Moran Avigny from a distance, hidden among the crowd.

Shielded by the camera, his azure eyes rapidly shifted to a silver-black hue.

Eye of Calamity!

In Lumian's enhanced vision, a river of mercury materialized on Moran Avigny's body, composed of ethereal water droplets. Each droplet was adorned with intricate, interconnected symbols.

As Moran Avigny delivered a concise speech announcing various industrial cooperation agreements between the Intis Republic and the Loen Kingdom, Lumian meticulously analyzed the Minister of Industry's past, present, and future, uncovering the fragments of fate concealed within each mercurial droplet.

The more distant the past, the greater the ambiguity. Lumian concentrated on the events of the preceding two weeks.

He witnessed Moran Avigny residing in a government-provided villa, attending weekly gatherings at cafés to discuss matters of state, exemplifying Trier's café politics.

Furthermore, Lumian observed Moran Avigny's attendance at salons, balls, banquets, operas, concerts, theaters, and art exhibitions. The Minister indulged in polo, poker, hunting in the suburbs, and flirtations with courtesans. He leveraged his position to secure favors, such as appointing the husband of one of his lovers as the deputy general manager of the Intis Industrial Credit Bank's Southern Continent branch—a coveted role known for its prestige, generous compensation, and influence. The sole drawback was the necessity of leaving Trier for the Southern Continent for two to three years, initially without the companionship of spouse and children.

These observations aligned perfectly with Lumian's preconceived notions of Trier's elite society.

Amidst the hazy fragments, two particular instances captured Lumian's attention.

In one, Moran Avigny sat alone in his study, perusing a document. Abruptly, he jotted down a note and reached into a nearby mirror. His hand, seemingly incorporeal, passed through the glass surface, depositing the note within.

The other featured Moran Avigny's fleeting encounter with an unfamiliar individual during a hunting excursion in the West Lognes Forest. What piqued Lumian's interest was the thin, white fog enveloping this fragment, rendering it indistinct.

This peculiar obscurity differed from the typical vagueness of most fate fragments.

The first fragment confirmed Moran Avigny's identity as a Mirror Person. Among the 22 paths of the divine, Demonesses proficient in mirror magic could not transmit information or objects through mirrors until attaining the rank of Sequence 4 demigods. If Moran Avigny were a demigod-level Demoness, his existence as a man would be impossible.

Lumian could only surmise two possibilities:

First, Mirror People possessed an innate mastery over mirrors, surpassing even Demonesses in the realm of mirror magic.

Second, Moran Avigny had originally been a Demoness at the demigod level who later consumed a higher Sequence Hunter potion, successfully transforming into a man. This implied that the Minister of Industry was at least a Sequence 3 Saint, if not an Angel.

Considering the intelligence gathered by Franca and the others, the information provided by 007, and the clearer fate fragments, Lumian concluded that Moran Avigny had never exhibited any Hunter-related traits. He was undoubtedly a Mirror Person, albeit an extraordinary one.

The second fate fragment intrigued Lumian due to its relative uniqueness. It might contain crucial information, but deciphering it eluded him for the moment.

Shifting his focus to Moran Avigny's future, Lumian examined the myriad potential fate tributaries. As anticipated, one tributary bore a faint black tinge.

This mercurial offshoot, like many others, “rehearsed” Moran Avigny's interview and subsequent return to the Ministry of Industry in a private carriage. However, it diverged when, upon entering his office and sitting for a while, Moran Avigny willingly stepped into the full-body mirror near the coat rack and vanished.

Lumian's foresight extended no further.

Based on his observations, Lumian deduced that if Moran Avigny ventured into the mirror world before noon, he would face a life-threatening calamity.

Yet, the probability of Moran Avigny taking such an action was minimal. Among the numerous fate tributaries, only one represented this possibility.

Certainly, if Lumian disregarded the risk of exposure, he could harness nearly half of his spirituality to manipulate Moran Avigny's future, steering it towards that specific tributary. However, such an act would be futile.

Moran Avigny's demise in the mirror world would merely prevent them from accessing his corpse and conducting the spirit channeling ritual.

The Demoness of Black likely possesses the ability to enter the mirror world as well. However, with her as the spirit channeler, obtaining the relevant information would prove impossible. Even if Franca has fully earned her trust, certain knowledge would remain undisclosed until she attains a specific Sequence... Lumian noticed Moran Avigny's posture signaling the conclusion of the interview, and his bodyguards began navigating through the reporters. Consequently, Lumian ceased using the Eye of Calamity and captured a black-and-white photograph, maintaining his façade.

Subsequently, he gradually retreated from the throng of reporters and made his way to the public washroom. He stashed the camera within his Traveler's Bag, donned Lie, and transformed back into Ciel Dubois. As a guest, he entered the annex restaurant of Champs-Élysées.

Franca awaited him there.

Following the waiter to his designated spot, Lumian noticed a man and a woman engaged in coffee.

The woman possessed black hair, brown eyes, and an alluring beauty. Her attire accentuated her slightly exaggerated aura. The man, by contrast, appeared ordinary, clad in a double-

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breasted flannel coat, wrinkled pants, buckled leather boots, and a top hat adorned with soft fur—the favored ensemble of Trier's bankers and financiers in recent times.

Lumian noticed that the man and woman weren't attracted by any aura of wealth. Instead, he recognized the beautiful woman with foreign features.

She, of course, had no knowledge of him. He had only glimpsed her photograph in Ghost Face.

She was Perle, a theater actress from Loen and a courtesan in Trier.

DuVar, the inventor of DuVar's broth and proprietor of the esteemed restaurant, had once lavished a substantial sum on her. He had even attempted suicide because of her, albeit unsuccessfully.

At present, Perle and the middle-aged man, presumed to be a banker, had not yet begun their meal. They were simply savoring their coffee.

The middle-aged man picked up Perle's empty coffee cup and gestured to the grounds, explaining something unknown to Lumian. The courtesan listened intently.

As he passed by, Lumian's keen senses allowed him to briefly eavesdrop. He swiftly grasped that the middle-aged man, believed to be a banker, was immersed in the art of coffee ground divination.

This popular divination method in high society was more akin to a game.

"If the remaining coffee grounds after drinking form a circle, it signifies recent signs of love..."

Upon hearing the middle-aged man's words, Lumian couldn't help but silently critique: Are you going to suggest that you'll be the love she's about to encounter?

Any other woman, even aware of the man's true intentions, would be secretly alarmed by divination results indicating traces of love. They might believe it to be fate's guidance. The various patterns naturally formed by the residual coffee grounds were thought to hold corresponding revelations about one's destiny, a notion widely accepted and impossible to manipulate.

However, given Perle's experience as a seasoned courtesan and her bold demeanor, Lumian had cause to suspect that she had deliberately manipulated the coffee grounds into a circular formation through her drinking technique.

After walking a short distance, Lumian spotted Franca.

The Demoness of Pleasure was dressed as a lady today, perfectly suited for the occasion. Lumian almost failed to recognize her.

Naturally, Franca still refrained from wearing a dress, opting instead for a pantsuit.

Observing Franca's elegantly styled hair, no longer in a ponytail, Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Jenna did your hair for you?"

"Indeed!" Franca responded, not with humiliated rage, but with a sense of smugness.

Before they could delve into their observations, a nearby waiter approached, presenting them with two identical menus.

Lowering her voice, Franca addressed Lumian in ancient Feysac, "The lunch set costs 7 verl d'or. If we order individually and indulge in some decent red wine, the bill for the two of us will amount to at least 50 verl d'or. That sum could easily feed your godson in the market district."

Franca found the restaurant at Grand Champs-Élysées not only expensive but also intriguing.

Switching to Intisian, Franca inquired of the waiter, “Any recommendations?”

The waiter, who had been sneaking glances at Franca, responded eagerly, “Would you like to try the Fürth fish?”

“In Trier, apart from certain private banquets, we are the sole establishment that serves Fürth fish.”

“What makes it so special?” Lumian asked, curiosity piqued.

Addressing Franca, the waiter explained, “Fürth fish appear semi-charred and can only be found in a specific section of Trier's underground river. Legend has it that long ago, they were ordinary fish. One day, an individual named Fürth caught one and set up a frying pan by the underground river, intending to cook it. Midway through the process, the fish managed to escape the frying pan and return to the river. It survived and spawned numerous descendants, all bearing the semi-charred appearance.

“The skin of this fish is fragrantly browned and oily, yet the flesh within is exceptionally tender...”

Trier's underground river... Half-burnt... Alive... Lumian extracted the keywords and suddenly speculated that this might be a consequence of the leakage of Fourth Epoch Trier's Hunter powers.

Smiling at Franca, he proposed, “Shall we each have one?”

“Very well.” Franca had already been contemplating giving it a try.

Chapter 705 Past

After the waiter left their secluded table with the order, Lumian picked up his tri-colored liqueur—a vibrant mix of red, white, and blue—and clinked glasses with Franca before taking a sip.

Glancing around to ensure no one could overhear, he quietly recounted the detailed fate fragments of Moran Avigny. As Franca listened, her expression gradually morphed, a frown creasing her lovely brow.

“That white, thin fog you described... it reminds me of something,” she said. “Does it have a mercurial, ever-shifting nature?”

Lumian considered briefly before nodding. “Yes, it does.”

Franca let out a soft sigh. “It must be the same phenomenon then. You know how I told you about Jenna and I getting tailed by that entrustee of the vanished Deep Valley Cloister gatekeeper at the mysticism gathering? The one we ended up fighting?”

“Well, when I channeled the guy's spirit and asked about his organizational ties, his physical form and spirit abruptly detonated. My mirror cracked from the blast, but right before shattering, it filled with that same thin, mercurial white mist.”

Franca paused, collecting her thoughts.

“According to the intel I passed along, 007 ran into a similar fog during their investigation of Deep Valley Town. Albert Goncourt, the Carbonari's leader, was spotted there too.

“As you're aware, the Carbonari played a role in stoking the riots during the Hostel plan. Their other leader, operating under the alias General Philip, spearheaded that particular scheme.”

Lumian swiftly connected the dots Franca was laying out.

“So you suspect the Carbonari is in league with multiple evil god cults, this peculiar white fog being tied to one of them—and that Moran Avigny is also entangled with this group. Meaning our supposedly chance encounter with him in the West Lognes Forest was anything but.”

“Precisely.” Franca took another sip of her liqueur. “And what's the ultimate endgame for these Mirror People? Surely not mere replacement of their originals.”

The mirror version of Gardner Martin had failed to succeed the real one, understandably using the Hostel plan to deal with his counterpart. But Moran Avigny, also a Mirror Person, had quietly replaced the original for decades, even fathering an illegitimate daughter and living a cushy life. Why collaborate with cults?

Smiling, Lumian replied, “The goals of Mirror People as a whole versus as individuals are bound to differ. Investigating should reveal the former. Back in Fourth Epoch Trier, Mirror Gardner Martin mentioned their loyalty and service to someone who holds all the answers. Learning that person's identity should tell us the Mirror People's endgame.”

Franca concurred succinctly, “We can plan our next moves around this strange fog. Deal with Moran Avigny to get more info on the Mirror People, which is already a lead. And capturing him or channeling his spirit could present other opportunities.”

Franca smiled. “Looks like 007 will be busy again.”

Their discussion of Moran Avigny complete, Lumian picked up some roasted pre-meal bread, chewing as he recounted his encounter with Courtesan Perle and the coffee ground divination he'd witnessed.

“She's unlikely to be a Demoness,” Franca concluded, a hint of disappointment in her voice.

Based on Lumian's description and reaction to Perle's appearance, she could tell the courtesan wasn't a Demoness.

Unless deliberately feigning ugliness, a Demoness's charms were impossible to conceal. Even gay men couldn't resist sneaking a few extra glances.

“Definitely not...” Lumian suddenly paused, remembering something.

Shifting to casual conversation, he asked, “Does coffee ground divination actually hold mystical significance? Can it truly provide revelation?”

Franca finished her bread, took another sip of the colorful liqueur, and smiled. “Of course mysticism is involved.”

Noting Lumian's lack of divination knowledge compared to his skill in reading fate, Franca explained with a smug grin.

“You don't need to put divination on some holy, unattainable pedestal.

“Our Astral Projections constantly interact with the spirit world, obtaining information and receiving revelations. These get reflected in reality through various forms.

“It's true for both Beyonders and ordinary people. But those unskilled in divination struggle to proactively obtain revelations or effectively interpret them.

“For example, if a Beyonder chokes on a fishbone while eating, they'll quickly realize it's a warning from their spirit, containing a revelation needing interpretation. But if regular folks have the same experience, they'll just think they were unlucky or careless. It won't stand out enough to warrant deeper consideration or deciphering.

“Of course, getting a stuck fishbone doesn't always indicate a spiritual warning. Usually it's just lack of care. Skilled diviners can tell the difference between a true revelation and a random occurrence. The unskilled tend to overthink, scaring themselves while ignoring what's truly concerning.”

Given their upcoming fish course, Franca had used a relatable example.

Lumian nodded, gaining a clearer understanding of divination.

He asked thoughtfully, “So without deliberate control over the drinking method, coffee ground patterns can reveal something—but ordinary people's interpretations may be inaccurate?”

“Precisely!” Franca said excitedly. “In the most rational environment, the decades-popular coffee ground divination can come extremely close to reality. Each divination session can refine the standard interpretations until the meaning of every ground formation is definitively established. Then even regular people could interpret with reasonable accuracy.

“Sadly, reality is no bastion of pure rationality. Believers in coffee divination subconsciously work to make even mistaken interpretations come true. Non-believers plainly see the interpretations don't match up. These conflicting approaches get all tangled together, preventing the codification of standard, reliable answers. In the end, it's just a game.”

As they conversed, the waiter served the various dishes, clearing used plates as part of the set procedure.

The fried Fürth fish arrived as a later main course.

Lumian cut a piece and tasted it—tender flesh with an intriguing blend of charred and oily notes, the pepper and salt seasoning just right.

“Delicious,” Franca praised. “And warming too.”

Lumian also felt a current of warmth spread through him as the Fürth fish reached his stomach.

“Some special ingredients indeed,” he concluded, teasing Franca. “Just don't eat too fast—wouldn't want you choking on a bone.”

Franca laughed. “You think a few bones can choke me?”

Glancing around to confirm the waiter's departure, she asked,

“I've been pondering something the last couple days. I still can't grasp the difference between using rituals and curses to influence a target's future fate versus directly compelling a fate change.

“I get the ritual part—it relies on the target's blood, close relatives, certain items, and mystically significant contact to alter their future fate. But how is that different from a curse?”

Lumian organized his thoughts before explaining.

“In the mysticism knowledge of Fate Appropriators, a curse is a curse of fate. Compared to rituals, curses are simpler, with fewer required conditions. But that significantly limits the ultimate effect. Nothing too outlandish can be achieved.

“Many bestowed of Inevitability like to call this type of curse Magnified Fate.

“It can only target fate tributaries within the next ten seconds, and must align with the current environment and circumstances. Meeting those prerequisites enables the fate curse to succeed. And the targeted fate tributary needs a certain probability of manifesting in the first place, or the success rate plummets.

“Simply put, one first uses or alters the environment to enable certain possibilities, then magnifies those possibilities—

assuming they weren't extremely unlikely to begin with.”

Lumian looked at Franca, raising his right palm to gesture as he mischievously provided an example.

“For instance, while you're eating fish, I could use a curse to magnify the chance of you choking on a bone. But I couldn't magnify the chance of your chair suddenly collapsing, impaling you with wood splinters.”

The moment he finished speaking, Franca froze, gasping twice as her throat worked. Within seconds, she spat out a bloody fishbone.

“You actually did it?” Franca grumbled. “Luckily my Sequence grants strong throat control. I handled it myself. Uh...” Franca suddenly paused. After a few seconds, she said, “Otherwise we'd be seeking a doctor's aid. How embarrassing would that be!”

Lumian chuckled. “I could've helped pull it out, magnifying the fate tributary of successful extraction.”

Franca was briefly speechless.

After eating another bite of Fürth fish, she nodded.

“I understand the differences now.

“Curses, or Magnify, suit combat. They're mainly for interfering with and influencing enemies, not accomplishing anything too exaggerated.

“Rituals are done in advance. With the right items, they can largely steer a target's fate as desired.”

“But only in a general direction,” Lumian added. “No real precision. I could make someone have a bad day, but not dictate the exact flavor of misfortune.”

Franca nodded.

“So compelling fate is like a streamlined ritual for live combat that still packs a punch?”

“Perhaps even stronger and more precise effects,” Lumian mused. “Plus, many abilities transformed in unique ways when Fate Appropriator and Reaper fused, bringing with them the relevant mystical knowledge. I can't fully distinguish the inherent from the individualized—I only know the Eye of Calamity and Compelling Fate came from Reaper.”

They enjoyed the rest of their lunch. As the meal concluded, Lumian pointed to the half-eaten Fürth fish, instructing the waiter, “I'd like this wrapped up to go.”

The waiter complied respectfully without question. Franca smiled teasingly. “How frugal of you.”

Lumian chuckled. “This is expected of a godfather. Besides, I'm curious what makes this fish so special.”

Chapter 706: The Utility of Delicacies

In another apartment on Rue Orosay in the Quartier de la Cathedrale Commemorative, Lumian placed the cold Furth fish in front of Ludwig.

Ludwig's eyes lit up when he saw the pan-fried fish in the exquisite wooden box. He quickly turned to Lugano, who understood his meaning and handed over a child's knife and fork he had found in the newly rented room.

Lumian leaned back in his chair and watched as Ludwig sliced the remaining half of the fish into pieces, chewing and swallowing the meat along with the bones.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, Ludwig narrowed his eyes, seemingly enjoying himself, and said, "The Forth Firefish is a mutated fish resulting from the corruption leaking from Fourth Epoch Trier. Its breed stabilized 769 years ago and mainly resides in the Danro section of the underground Madar River. Its meat and blood can be concocted into a 'warm cocktail' with various sunflowers. After drinking it, one can resist the effects of the cold to a certain extent for half an hour.

"A Furth Firefish that has lived for over a decade is an ingredient rich in spirituality. Using its meat, blood from a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, ice, and lemon juice, one can cook Ice Lemon Fish fillets. After anyone eats them for the first time, they permanently enjoy reduced damage from flames. Eating them later will enhance the effect, but it only lasts for half an hour."

Lumian nodded in enlightenment. In Franca's words, the first time its eaten, it adds some permanent fire resistance. The subsequent enhancements are temporary...

Lugano was taken aback.

Ludwig actually knows cooking?

Moreover, it involves cooking with superpowers!

Can 1 help him get ingredients rich in spirituality and have him make similar delicacies for me?

It seems capable of permanently enhancing some of my abilities!

After Ludwig finished his meal, Lumian suddenly thought of something.

Franca's ritual for advancing to the Demoness of Affliction involved being burned at the stake—without using a substitute—for fifteen minutes and surviving without going mad.

If Franca eats Furth Firefish's Ice Lemon Fish fillet to increase her fire resistance, although the pain won't abate, her chances of surviving the incineration will greatly increase. When the time comes, she can eat some more temporarily before the ritual. Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made up his mind.

Today, he would head to Underground Trier to search for Fiirth Firefish that had lived for over a decade!

From his Traveler's Bag, Lumian retrieved a map of Underground Trier reconstructed from his memories, derived from the one Gardner Martin had once displayed. He searched for the location of the Danro section of the Madar underground river.

As Lumian scrutinized the map, he asked Ludwig with a smile, "How do you know the precise name of the source? Do Furth Firefish have knowledge of the rivers they inhabit?"

Ludwig licked his lips, unsatisfied.

“Indeed, they do. From years of fishing, humans inevitably mention the names of rivers and specific sections. Even if Furth Firefish don't comprehend the meaning, they instinctively retain this information in their corresponding cells when repeatedly exposed to it.”

“Interesting.” Lumian had posed the question in jest, not anticipating such a serious response.

Pointing to himself, he inquired curiously, “Will consuming the Ice Lemon Fish fillet reduce the burn damage I sustain?”

As a Reaper, flames inflict relatively minimal damage to him.

Ludwig picked up a minuscule remnant of the fish, no larger than a grain of rice, from the exquisite wooden box and presented it to Lumian. “Only this much.”

Without hesitation, the boy promptly popped the morsel into his mouth.

“Well, that's better than nothing,” Lumian remarked with a smile and a sigh.

He intended to secure a special serving of Ice Lemon Fish fillet for himself, with additional portions for Jenna, Anthony, Lugano, and Ludwig!

To accomplish this task, Lumian proactively inquired, “How does a Furth Firefish that has lived for over a decade differ from its ordinary counterparts?”

Ludwig's response sounded as if he were reciting from a textbook, “A Furth Firefish that has survived for more than a decade can grow to nearly a meter in length and tends to reside in caves at the riverbed. They rarely approach the surface but exhibit a keen sensitivity to blood and spiritually rich food. These fish are highly aggressive and willing to take significant risks driven by their instincts.

“Their skin has hardened, rendering them impervious to fishing spears. Sharp teeth fill their mouths, enabling them to devour any humans who happen to fall into the river. Additionally, their blood possesses a distinct burning characteristic.”

After attentively listening, Lumian calmly assessed the information.

Despite their longevity of over a decade, Furth Firefish did not possess Beyonder characteristics or acquire supernatural abilities through boons. They belonged to a species that had undergone corruption but had since stabilized.

If they were to continue living in such an environment for tens of thousands of years, they might evolve into creatures with their own intricate society, akin to the Batings Black Insect.

As he put away the map and stood up, Lumian turned to Ludwig and asked thoughtfully before leaving,

“Apart from the permanent enhancements, does this special cooking method involve any adverse effects, such as corruption?”

Ludwig scrutinized Lumian and remained silent. Lumian suspected that Ludwig was internally mocking him.

For someone already deeply corrupted, the concern over a minuscule amount of additional corruption seemed trivial.

After a brief pause, Ludwig replied, "As a child, I lack understanding of such matters. What I do know is that if one desires to indulge in finer and more delectable cuisine, they must be willing to accept the associated risks. Those unwilling to take the risk can simply choose not to partake..."

Ludwig instinctively added, "If you don't wish to eat, you can always leave the food for me."

With a slight nod, Lumian opened the door and exited the apartment.

In the depths of Underground Trier, the Madar River flowed through a tranquil, deserted, and dimly lit cave, its gentle splashing echoing in the distance.

Emerging from the shadows, Lumian, Franca, and Jenna made their way to the riverbank. One carried a carbide lamp, while the other two traveled empty-handed.

Although ingredient suppliers seeking to monopolize Furth Firefish guarded this section of the subterranean river, it posed no significant challenge for a Hunter and two Demonesses. Utilizing the shadows, they deftly navigated through the patrolled area and successfully reached the water's edge.

Raising his carbide lamp, Lumian discovered that the underground river was not only expansive but also incredibly deep. Submerged caves lined the riverbed, inhabited by peculiar fish.

After a quick survey, Lumian set the carbide lamp down, rolled up his sleeves, and crouched beside the river.

Without hesitation, he plunged his right arm into the frigid water.

"Is this your preferred method of fishing?" Franca inquired, well aware of Lumian's penchant for "fishing." However, she hadn't anticipated him employing the same technique when his prey was, quite literally, fish.

"What alternative do I have?" Lumian chuckled. "Would you prefer I strip down, dive into the underwater caves, and catch them with my bare hands?"

"That's not an impossibility," Franca replied with a playful smile. "It would provide an excellent opportunity to admire your physique."

Ignoring her comment, Lumian focused his spirituality, causing a thin layer of white flames to emanate from his thumb.

The flames, resistant to the water's extinguishing effect, took the form of a small knife and carefully sliced his index finger. A single drop of blood seeped out, rapidly dispersing into the surrounding water.

The Forth Firefish swimming in the shallows seemed to detect an ominous presence and swiftly retreated from the area where the blood had spread.

Moments later, enormous Furth Firefish, their skin charred and hardened, emerged from the caves along the riverbed.

One particularly swift specimen reached Lumian's right hand in a flash, its mouth wide open to reveal sharp, gleaming teeth. Before it could sink its teeth into his flesh, Lumian's palm abruptly clenched into a fist. Instead of withdrawing, he thrust his hand forward, punching directly into the fish's gaping maw.

With a resounding bang, Lumian grasped the creature's skull and hauled the colossal Furth fish out of the river.

Silently, cold and sinister black flames ignited in the river, incinerating Lumian's blood that had merged with the water.

It was Jenna.

“We can return now,” Lumian declared, tossing the massive Furth fish to Franca.

As Franca caught the ingredient, freezing it and storing it in her Traveler's Bag, she appeared lost in thought.

Keenly observing her demeanor, Lumian asked, “What's on your mind?”

Pointing in a specific direction, Franca responded, “I remember that nearby, we entered a unique mirror world and acquired the classic silver mirror that granted Anthony and me access to Fourth Epoch Trier.”

“Indeed,” Lumian acknowledged, gesturing for Franca to continue.

Averting her gaze, Franca expressed her thoughts, “I'm contemplating whether we could utilize the mirror world to stage an ambush against Moran Avigny. Specifically, I'm referring to the conventional mirror world that interconnects all the mirrors in this world.”

In the conventional sense, the mirror world functioned more akin to a conceptual amalgamation of doors rather than a tangible realm. It served as an intricate network of passageways linking various mirrors and enigmatic lands. In essence, if Franca could harness the mirror world and pinpoint the precise location, she could conceal herself behind the mirror frequently used by Moran Avigny and launch an attack the moment her target entered.

“What is it that you truly wish to convey?” Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Franca eagerly elaborated, “Considering that a portion of the corruption from Fourth Epoch Trier has seeped into this area, giving rise to unique creatures like Furth Firefish and the extraordinary mirror world we previously explored, is it plausible that within this vast underground expanse, there exists a secluded corner influenced by the corruption of a select few high-level Demoness powers over an extended period?”

Could it be possible for one to traverse through the mirror and enter the mirror world without attaining the status of a demigod Demoness?”

After a moment of serious contemplation, Lumian replied, “It's a possibility.”

Jenna's eyes darted around as she suggested, “Could it be the location where you discovered the special mirror? That area must have been corrupted by the power emanating from Fourth Epoch Trier's mirror world.”

“We can investigate,” Lumian said with a smile. “There's no need to rush. If it proves unsuccessful, we can bide our time. Once Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic is transformed into a Sealed Artifact, perhaps we can assume the form of Wraiths and conceal ourselves within the mirror. However, I'm uncertain whether Wraiths possess the ability to navigate the mirror world.

“Let's prioritize the search!” Franca declared, retrieving her Mirror World Fragment. She hoped that this item might provide some unique means of detection.

Lumian glanced at the fragment and, after a brief contemplation, advised seriously, “Holding the Mirror World Fragment is unlikely to yield any benefit. Instead, take out the Primordial Demoness figurine..”

Chapter 707 Compulsion

In the dark, silent tunnel, Franca advanced slowly, holding the Primordial Demoness figurine made of bone. Her footsteps were so soft they were nearly inaudible.

Lumian, clutching his carbide lamp, and Jenna trailed silently behind her.

With a Hunter's keen understanding of the terrain and memories, the three had finished exploring the area where they had obtained the classic silver mirror. They had even expanded their search to include the nearby underground tunnels and connected quarry caves.

However, the Primordial Demoness figurine showed no abnormal reactions, and neither Franca nor Jenna sensed anything out of the ordinary.

Franca sighed. “Well, this is disappointing. Bold assumptions leading to a shameful failure!”

She had no intention of giving up, but wanted to return to the surface first and contact 007. She hoped to use the authorities' detailed records of underground abnormalities to search for any areas where a high-level Demoness's power might be seeping out.

Having experienced numerous mystical incidents, Lumian surveyed the area, pondering for a few seconds.

“Let's investigate again. This time, I'll extinguish the carbide lamp.

“In mysticism, Demonesses and the mirror world are always associated with darkness, evil, and quiet depth. Perhaps subtle reactions can occur in the absence of light.”

“Subtle reactions... What is this, a chemistry experiment?” Franca scoffed, but chose to comply. She turned to Jenna. “Hold your Mirror World Fragment in your hand. If we're giving this a shot, we should try everything.”

Jenna took out the Mirror World Fragment she had obtained from the Tamara family tomb, and Lumian turned the switch to extinguish the carbide lamp.

The silent tunnel plunged into absolute darkness. As a Hunter, Lumian couldn't see a thing.

“You can hold onto my sleeve,” Jenna suggested calmly. “Or activate your Spirit Vision and follow our spiritual light.”

Lumian replied with a smile, “That would make me look weak. I suspect you're deliberately showing off. Have you forgotten? I can gain night vision by changing my life form.”

Jenna was silent for a moment before retorting, “Dammit! Would it kill you to be a bit nicer about it?”

“She's right,” Franca agreed. “Jenna was just trying to help. It's fine if you don't want her assistance, but there's no need to mock her.”

“That's a Hunter for you.” Lumian chuckled as he activated the black mark on his body, transforming into a shadow creature.

He blended into the shadows and followed Franca and Jenna as they explored the area for the second time.

As Franca passed a corner of a quarry cave, she suddenly felt the bone figurine in her hand tremble slightly.

“There's a reaction! There's a reaction!” she exclaimed joyfully.

Lumian immediately left the shadows, transforming back into human form, his blue eyes tinged with silver-black.

In the absolute darkness, he saw the mercury rivers of fate belonging to Franca and Jenna.

As his spirituality rapidly depleted from the brief observation, Lumian found a possibility among the tributaries symbolizing Franca's future fate.

This was something that might happen in ten seconds or more. Furthermore, the probability of it occurring was extremely low—something Curse, or rather, Magnify, couldn't influence.

Without hesitation, Lumian extended his right palm toward Franca.

Franca, with her night vision, witnessed his actions and noticed his silver-black eyes. She jumped in fright.

“W-what are you doing?”

She didn't dodge, fully trusting Lumian.

Lumian roused his spirituality, transforming it into a violent illusory river that surged out of his palm.

Franca's fate was instantly thrust into a future by the mighty torrent.

Compelling Fate!

Franca suddenly had an idea.

“Are you influencing my future, allowing me to successfully utilize the corrupted fate fragments here to make it a reality?”

“Dammit, I really do have an idea. Maybe I should give it a try!”

Lumian, his spirituality greatly depleted, chuckled. “Life is short, why not give it a try?”
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“...” Franca could clearly detect the mockery in his tone. She gritted her teeth. “I’ll deal with you later!”

As she spoke, Franca placed the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine on a protruding rock in a corner of the mine. Then she took out a mirror and placed it in front of the figurine.

Lumian conjured a blazing white fireball and observed as Franca retrieved essential oils, extracts, perfume, and herbal powder from her Traveler's Bag, preparing for the ritual.

Uh... Lumian turned to Jenna, who happened to look back at him.

Franca simultaneously turned to face them.

The three were taken aback for a moment before bursting into laughter.

“You two thought of it too?” Franca said happily. “Jenna shouldn't stay here. The Primordial Demoness might cast Her gaze here later.”

As a pure female Demoness, it would definitely not bode well for Jenna to be noticed by the Primordial Demoness. It could even mean death.

Lumian replied with a smile, “I’ll send Jenna back first and come back after the ritual.”

With that, he reached out and grabbed Jenna's shoulder.

Jenna said to Franca, “Be careful.”

“Don't worry, I'm a skilled worker,” Franca replied, waving her hand cheerfully.

As a member of the Demoness Sect, she regularly prayed to the Primordial Demoness through the bone figurine, following the Demoness of Black's instructions. Occasionally, she even held a solo Mass.

Of course, this was the first time she would be praying to the Primordial Demoness through a ritual.

After Lumian teleported away with Jenna, the quarry cave returned to darkness.

With the bone figurine, Franca decided to use a dualistic ritual.

After lighting the candle representing herself, she drew her needs on a faux goatskin with the corresponding symbols and patterns, drawing upon her extensive mysticism knowledge.

Following that, she sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. She dripped rose essential oil, musk, and perfume into the candle flame.

Franca's heart skipped a beat as the alluring, complex scent quickly entered her nostrils. She couldn't help but inhale deeply.

After completing all the preparations, Franca took two steps back and recited the Primordial Demoness's honorific name in Hermes.

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

In the altar, a small amount of moss suddenly grew, entangling into vines that rose high, as if staring at Franca.

The ground softened, and a frigid wind blew, causing Franca to tremble.

Simultaneously, Franca sensed the fragrance in the area grow sweeter, carrying a warm charm that made her blush.

This invigorated her specific desires, and charming scenes surfaced in her mind.

Suppressing the heat in her body and shaking off her discomfort, Franca briefly recounted how Moran Avigny was a Mirror Person and how she wanted to capture him. Then, following the ritual's standard procedure, she said,

“I pray for the power of the mirror.

“I pray for the power of chaos.

“I pray for God's protection.

“I pray for a fixed entrance to the mirror world to appear here.

“Roses, a herb that belongs to the Demoness, please pass your power to my incantation.

“Musk, a herb that belongs to the Demoness, please pass your power to my incantation...”

After reciting the incantation, Franca ignited the faux goatskin and placed it on the mirror in front of the bone figurine.

As the faux goatskin burned away, Franca felt the candle flame dim, as if a layer of translucent mullioned glass had materialized around it.

A strange power was activated, gathering in the mirror.

The human-head-sized mirror suddenly darkened, turning shadowy and illusory.

It melded with the protruding rock where the figurine was placed and vanished.

In the next moment, the candle flame returned to normal, and the fragrance lingering in the air still unsettled Franca. Her thoughts raced, requiring immense strength to control herself.

After tidying up the bone figurine and other items, Franca took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

Dammit, just the charm and pleasure emanating from the ritual nearly made me lose myself. All I wanted was to approach the source of the charm and enjoy the pleasures bestowed by Her.

As expected of the Primordial Demoness who controls pleasure and feminine charm...

Dammit! I'm an idiot. Why did I take a deep breath? The smell here hasn't dissipated!

I need to quickly confirm if there's an entrance to the mirror world before heading back to Jenna...

As these thoughts raced through Franca's mind, she saw Lumian's figure swiftly materialize at the edge of the quarry cave.

Franca jumped in fright. "Why are you back already?"

Lumian chuckled. "You're in pretty good shape. Didn't I say I'd return after your ritual...?"

As he spoke, Lumian noticed Franca's lake-blue eyes rippling under the dim candlelight, as if they could captivate one's soul.

Lumian's words faltered.

After a brief pause, he added, "Besides, Jenna was worried about you and asked me to come check on you.

"I believe the Primordial Demoness can understand that a Demoness of Pleasure has a friend who cares about her."

"Yeah." Franca nodded gently, bit her lip, and pointed at the protruding rock. "That spot seems to have become a fixed entrance to the mirror world. Let's see if we can enter."

Lumian didn't inquire further. He approached the protruding rock and, together with Franca, extended his right palm, pressing it against the cold stone.

A faint light flickered, and the two vanished on the spot.

After a brief moment of vertigo, a dark, illusory path appeared before Lumian and Franca's eyes. Surrounding them were numerous similar "tunnels," intertwining to form a complicated and mysterious colossal spiderweb.

Chapter 708 Remnant Influence

Is this an ordinary mirror world? Lumian gazed at the dark, illusory paths around him that resembled a mosquito landing on a complicated spiderweb. For some reason, he felt a surge of fear, as if a colossal, warped, pitch-black spider could crawl out from the depths of this strange land at any moment and drag him and Franca into the darkness that symbolized destruction.

"Is every illusory path connected to a mirror?" Franca's voice suddenly echoed in Lumian's ears, so close he could hear her breathing.

Simultaneously, Lumian caught a whiff of a warm, sweet fragrance. His blood vessels inexplicably pulsed, and his body and mind relaxed slightly.

At some point, Franca had moved to his side, her eyes flickering as she surveyed their surroundings.

Lumian nodded slightly. "In theory, yes."

"No!" Franca rejected her speculation. "They might also be connected to some mysterious alternate space."

"That's right..." Lumian recalled his understanding of the mirror world.

He exhaled and took a step forward.

"I believe those situations should also be connected to mirrors, mirrors that belong to those mysterious alternate spaces."

Without waiting for Franca's response, he pointed at the dark illusory path ahead and said,

"Before understanding the mirror world's coordinates and location, recklessly traversing this place is likely very dangerous. If we're lucky, we might only end up at the wrong mirror and have no choice but to return to the real world. If we're unlucky, we'll reach a mirror representing a dangerous place. When we leave, we'll have to face terrifying enemies. If we're super unlucky..."

At this point, Lumian paused.

Franca squeezed to his side and asked in a soft voice, "What happens if we're super unlucky?"

"W-we'll vanish from this mirror world forever. We won't be seen alive, and if we're dead, our corpses will go missing." Lumian composed himself and took another step forward.

All of a sudden, he sensed the dark, illusory path morph into a massive vortex, tugging him into its depths.

Franca experienced a comparable sensation, her spirituality sending her a powerful warning.

They both stepped back in unison, evading the absorption of the fearsome vortex.

"How treacherous," Franca sighed. "Just getting close to these illusory paths without going further can make you plummet into an unknown mirror. Maybe we can only count on the luck of Winners in a situation like this. Let's hope our destination isn't too terrible. Uh, your Magnify or Compelling Fate abilities should come in handy."

Lumian nodded.

"I initially thought the mirror world was closely tied to the spirit world, and teleportation would work here too. But from what I can see, while there is a connection, it's not strong enough to enable my teleportation. It's not that I can't teleport, but it's way too risky. There's nearly a 100% chance of getting lost.

“Without comprehending the abilities associated with the mirror world, I don't suggest using this place to ambush Moran Avigny, unless we're aided by a high-level Demoness or a high-level Apprentice.”

Noticing Franca nod pensively, Lumian sighed in relief and intentionally taunted, “Have you recovered?”

“Huh?” Franca was startled momentarily before her embarrassment morphed into anger. “What other option do I have? When I use a ritual to seek aid from the Primordial One, I'm inevitably impacted. Sometimes I'm lured, sometimes I'm in pain, and sometimes I'm dejected, as if I've temporarily developed a mental disorder. Sometimes I go rigid for a while, as if I've been petrified...”

Since officially joining the Demoness Sect, the Demoness of Black had shared extensive mysticism knowledge with Franca, particularly concerning prayers to the Primordial Demoness.

On such topics, the Demoness of Black explained: As the ritual's host, the ritual itself granted a degree of protection. The extent to which she was influenced by the Primordial One's overflowing presence was quite minimal. Once the ritual concluded, she would recover after withstanding it for ten to twenty seconds. The only thing to watch out for was the desires arising from their typical reaction to being entranced by the Primordial One. Their fading would be comparatively gradual, but what Demoness didn't have numerous lovers? There was no need to be overly concerned about this.

The longer Franca talked, the more forceful she became, even a tad aggrieved.

“That's a genuine deity. How can I possibly resist a genuine deity's overflowing influence?”

“If I weren't the ritual's host, I would've been unable to restrain myself and would've unleashed my primal instincts.”

Franca couldn't suppress a chuckle at the reference to her primal nature.

Within the mirror world, she had consistently called the Primordial Demoness the Primordial One to prevent blasphemy.

After pondering for a moment, Lumian replied, “Praying to a different genuine deity won't lead to anything comparable unless someone present is blasphemous.”

“It's the Primordial One's fault for being in such a terrible state.” Franca had already come up with the justification. “Don't assume you can withstand it simply because you're an Ascetic. If you had been there and not the ritual's host, I would've witnessed your primal nature erupt.”

At this juncture, she appraised Lumian and grinned.

“It's not like you didn't react. Were you worried you couldn't restrain yourself, so you purposely exposed me and created an awkward situation?”

Subconsciously, Franca's breathing turned labored again.

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Lumian scoffed.

“When I got there, the scene's lingering effects hadn't fully dissipated, and a peculiar fragrance permeated the air. That was a genuine deity. How could I withstand even the tiniest bit of a genuine deity's overflowing influence?”

He echoed Franca's words.

“Really? Is it merely due to the lingering aroma?” Franca's lake-blue eyes narrowed menacingly, as if challenged.

The aqueous light in her eyes resurfaced, glittering like shards of sunlight.

Lumian exhaled and stepped to the side, grasping Franca's upper arm.

“I'll send you back first. Jenna is waiting for you.”

“We're heading back already?” Franca asked, surprised. “Won't you explore the mirror world further and consider how to utilize this place?”

“I have a plan.” Lumian tugged Franca away from the illusory tunnel's spiderweb-like darkness.

As they returned to the quarry cave, Franca, her focus diverted, inquired, “What plan?”

While Lumian tried to activate the black mark on his right shoulder, he responded impassively, “Contract ability.”

He intended to establish a contract with a Beyonder creature possessing a mirror world traversal ability to acquire the corresponding characteristics!

Regardless, he hadn't determined which three abilities to contract this time. This could be one of them.

“You're right, a contract ability...” Franca was thrilled.

She then noticed Lumian was still motionless. Comprehending, she murmured into his ear, “Didn't you want to teleport? Why haven't we departed? Does your Spirit World Traversal activation always take this long, or are you enduring something?”

As Franca completed her sentence, the pair vanished from the gloomy quarry cave.

That evening, in Lumian's rented apartment, the nearly one-

meter-long Fürth Firefish was set on the dining table. Ludwig used a child's table knife to break through the charred and tough fish skin, cutting the fair fish meat into pieces.

Lumian glanced at Franca, who had donned a light-colored hunting suit, and noticed the Demoness of Pleasure's gaze was elusive, brimming with embarrassment.

She appeared to be lamenting: Kill me! This is too mortifying. I don't want to live anymore!

Lumian, who had been feeling slightly embarrassed himself, smiled.

He mouthed to Franca,

“Post-nut clarity is truly remarkable.”

Despite Franca's inability to lip-read, she still sensed Lumian's ridicule.

Pleasure is detrimental! Pleasure is detrimental! Irrespective of gender, when thoughts of pleasure dominate one's mind, one will invariably engage in various actions that result in their own ruin!

How humiliating!

I don't want to live!

In that instant, Franca longed for a crevice in the ground to conceal herself.

Anthony, sitting silently at the dining table, glanced at Lumian, then at Franca, before looking away.

At last, Ludwig removed the inedible parts and sliced the fish fillets into three soup pots.

Franca sealed one of the pots with ice and stored it in her Traveler's Bag for later use. Ludwig slid the other one to Lugano and spoke in a childish tone, “Can we have fish fillet and clam cream broth tonight?”

“Sure,” Lugano promptly agreed.

He made an effort to avert his gaze from Franca and Jenna, the two Demonesses, believing it was disrespectful to his boss.

From his viewpoint, these two Demonesses were probably the boss's lovers.

He couldn't help but marvel inwardly.

As expected of the boss. He really has Demonesses as his lovers, and there are two of them!

Back then, Emperor Roselle only had one.

After adding a generous amount of lemon juice to the pot of fish fillets, Ludwig slid them toward Lumian.

His intention was evident. He required the blood of a Mid-Sequence Beyond the Hunter pathway.

“How much do you need?” Lumian inquired.

“Enough to stir it up,” Ludwig replied, acting as if this was the bare minimum.

Jenna frowned and asked, “How much does each person need to eat to gain that permanent effect?”

Ludwig answered innocently, “Different physiques and Sequences need different quantities. You'll only find out when you actually eat it.”

Lumian raised his eyebrows and poured the rest of Gardner Martin's blood into the soup pot.

Noticing it was still insufficient, he used a ritual silver dagger to slice his hand and dripped 20 to 30 milliliters of blood into it.

Ludwig observed with anticipation.

“Aren't you concerned about corruption?” Lumian asked with a smirk.

Ludwig shook his head. “The quantity here isn't substantial.”

Franca tried her best to act normally and remarked with amusement, “Discussing toxicity without considering dosage is just playing the rogue.”

“Indeed.” Ludwig concurred with Franca and stirred the fish slices in the soup with a spoon.

Gradually, the tender-white fish soaked up the seemingly searing blood, and the fish slowly started to brown.

“Add some ice,” Ludwig instructed Franca and Jenna.

The two Demonesses rose in unison and extended their hands toward the soup pot.

Drops of white frost condensed and descended like rain, noticeably slowing the browning of the fish until it ceased.

Ludwig leaped off his chair and dashed into the kitchen, returning with a few silver plates. He distributed seven to eight Ice Lemon Fish fillets to each of them.

“Is that all?” Jenna asked with a surprised smile.

“If it's not enough, you can have two or three more,” Ludwig replied earnestly.

Jenna instinctively wanted to say something, but she refrained when she saw Ludwig's childlike demeanor.

She pointed at their plates and said, “Did you request so much of Lumian's blood just to eat such a small portion of the fish?”

“Why not prepare less and save the remaining half of the pot for tomorrow?”

Ludwig hugged the soup pot in front of him and shouted, “Mine!”

“...” Jenna suddenly felt like a witch stealing candy from a child.

He's definitely abusing his power... Lumian glanced at Ludwig and shook his head in amusement. “At least you have some sense when it comes to food.”

With that, Lumian polished off all the Ice Lemon Fish fillets on his plate.

Chapter 709 “Chef”

The sour lemon flavor, tender fish texture, scorching aroma, and subtle sweetness with hints of fish and oil burst forth in Lumian's mouth. The taste exceeded his expectations.

He had anticipated dishes like this would be unpalatable and jarring, similar to a potion, but he never thought they would be considered delicious.

When given a choice, Ludwig has a genuine preference for delicacies and doesn't fool himself... Lumian chewed and swallowed the seven or eight fish slices.

A mild burning sensation spread from his throat to his stomach, reminiscent of drinking a glass of liquor.

The sensation quickly faded, and nothing unusual happened.

“That's it? It worked?” Lumian glanced at Ludwig.

Ludwig shook his head.

“Give it another two to three minutes for your stomach to absorb it.”

“So fast?” Franca asked, surprised.

She respected mysticism, but having taken potions before, she knew they worked instantaneously. Ludwig's delicacies, however, seemed to require digestion and absorption by the stomach, contradicting how the organ typically functioned.

Plus, the stomach didn't absorb everything!

Ludwig responded seriously, “A Chef's creations can be rapidly absorbed by the stomach.”

Chef... Lumian nodded, deep in thought.

He remembered Ludwig frequently commenting on various things like a food connoisseur.

Without further explanation, Ludwig buried his face in the soup pot before him and polished off the remaining Ice Lemon Fish fillets.

Jenna and the others promptly finished the fish slices on their own plates.

Two minutes later, Lumian felt his body growing warm, with a tingling sensation in his skin and flesh.

The effect on him was minimal. It paled in comparison to drinking a potion, let alone the pain of burning himself with flames.

Soon, Lumian returned to normal, his expression unaltered.

He glanced playfully at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, waiting to see how the Ice Lemon Fish fillet would affect them.

A minute later, Jenna and the others suddenly flushed, as if they had eaten incredibly spicy food from the Feynapotter Kingdom highlands.

“Hiss...” Lugano let out a pained gasp, feeling a searing sensation in his breath.

Originating from within his body, he couldn't have treated it even if he wanted to.

Frost enveloped Franca's body, seemingly trying to soothe the pain in her skin and flesh.

It was futile.

Jenna and Anthony grimaced but made no unnecessary movements. They bore the discomfort, waiting for the Ice Lemon Fish fillet to finish transforming their bodies.

This lasted for ten to twenty seconds before the quartet's expressions relaxed.

“How does it feel?” Lumian asked with a smile.

Franca instinctively recalled the sensation and said, “It was like every inch of my skin and flesh had been burned. Hmm, not quite that intense—relatively mild...”

While speaking, she took a matchbox from her Traveler's Bag and experimentally lit two matches. She held them to the back of her left hand for a bit.

Franca's expression gradually contorted. She endured the pain in her left hand momentarily before pulling it back and shaking it.

The matchbox fell to the ground.

“It still hurts!” Franca reported the experiment results to Lumian and Jenna through gritted teeth.

Ludwig hastily replied, “It doesn't reduce pain.”

“How's the wound?” Jenna asked, concerned.

Franca immediately checked the back of her left hand, seeing only slight burn marks on her pale skin with minimal physical damage.

“It works, even though the flame temperature wasn't that high, to begin with...” Franca's expression eased.

Across the dining table, Anthony carefully considered his words before saying, “I think I'm a bit more irritable than usual, but within reasonable limits.”

Jenna added, “I'm grumpy too, but not drastically.”

Franca and Lugano confirmed experiencing the same thing.

Swallowing the Ice Lemon Fish fillet, Ludwig explained, “That's to be expected. Effectiveness comes with corruption.”

Jenna and Franca turned to Lumian.

Lumian spread his hands, smiling. “I don't feel any different.”

For him, the Ice Lemon Fish fillet's corruption was negligible.

Franca wasn't sure whether to feel envious or sympathetic. After a moment's thought, she said, “This is like a milder version of being a Contractee—tolerating certain negative effects in exchange for corresponding Beyond traits. Sure, the effects are noticeably weaker, but the upside is it's passive. Plus, the negative effects are minimal.

“Going forward, when you get similar ingredients, you need to clarify the permanent and negative effects. You can't just eat everything. Choices have to be made. Otherwise, things can easily go wrong.”

Lumian glanced at Ludwig and said, “That depends on the individual.”

Maybe a Chef, or the Gourmet pathway, had Sequences that mitigated the corresponding impact, akin to Alms Monks and Ascetics who were Contractees.

Franca grasped Lumian's implication and continued excitedly,

“Dishes and concoctions without permanent effects are like various Apothecary pathway agents.

“I've always envied Contractees. I wanted the freedom to mix and match abilities, creating a unique character build. Now, without accepting an evil god's boon, I finally have a chance, albeit a diluted one.”

Jenna's heart raced, and the two Demonesses gazed at Ludwig, eyes shining.

To them, he was no longer the gluttonous monster child Lumian had described, but a Beyonder chef deserving of their care and attention.

Ludwig concentrated on eating the leftover Ice Lemon Fish fillet, not reacting further.

In a quarry cave in Underground Trier.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony stood beyond the spirituality wall, observing Lumian conduct the ritual to acquire new contract abilities.

Having thoroughly reviewed Madam Magician's information on spirit world entities and possessing the strange creature knowledge granted by the boon, Lumian swiftly identified two potential contract targets with mirror travel abilities.

The first was a spirit world being called Bloody Jack. According to the information, in the Loen Kingdom's south, some mysticism enthusiasts and folklore academics were playing a divination game when they spotted a blurry figure in the mirror wielding a large axe, drenched in blood. This figure would emerge from the mirror, assaulting and slaughtering everyone present.

The second was the Daratra Diamond Maggots, mentioned in the Contractee's mysticism knowledge. They could grant Mirror Traversal in exchange for sacrificing a crystallized meteorite. The drawback was that one's body would become denser and shorter.

Lumian undeniably wanted to summon Bloody Jack but wasn't certain if it possessed an ability akin to Mirror Traversal.

Gazing at the three lit candles, Lumian stepped back twice and chanted in ancient Hermes, “The Fool that doesn't belong to this era;

“You are the ruler above the gray fog;

“You are the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.

“I beseech your shelter.

“I pray for your attention.

“I!

“In the name of the great Fool, I summon:

“The peculiar creature that wanders about the unfounded, the slaughterer hidden in the mirror, Jack from the bloody world...”

The bluish-black candle flame instantly swelled, forming an illusory door adorned with enigmatic patterns amidst the pervasive, eerie gray mist.

The door gradually opened, and darkness poured out, engulfing the mirror Lumian had placed on the altar.

The mirror abruptly levitated, pointing directly at Lumian. Within, an indistinct figure in a blood-stained old jacket dragged a massive axe.

Opening his mouth, Lumian made his throat and chest resonate as he spoke the Mystical Language of Fate.

Silver-black words akin to symbols materialized in midair, descending onto the faux goatskin at the altar's edge, forming a concise and ominous contract.

Upon the contract's formation, Lumian connected with Bloody Jack, comprehending its abilities and traits. He “listened” to its demands.

Bloody Jack possessed three mirror-related abilities and traits, which Lumian named Mirror Mark, Mirror Concealment, and Mirror Traversal.

Mirror Marks could invisibly mark a mirror, inverted from reality, to pinpoint a target. Mirror Concealment allowed the user to hide within the dark tunnels, avoiding being pulled into another mirror. Mirror Traversal enabled swift passage through the illusory tunnels.

Bloody Jack's demand was the sacrifice of 99 living humans.

Lumian pondered briefly, concluding that Mirror Mark was the optimal choice. Locating targets was paramount, and Mirror Traversal could be substituted with Spirit World Traversal. Rapid travel wasn't essential when he could arrive directly.

His eyes suddenly glinted silvery-black, mirroring Bloody Jack's river of fate.

He wasn't seeking information about Bloody Jack. Instead, under the ritual's protection, he aimed to verify something.

After a quick observation, Lumian switched to ancient Hermes and asked Bloody Jack, “Can I alter the request?”

He was unsure if Bloody Jack would comprehend or respond, but asking was harmless. If not, he would have to write to Madam Magician, inquiring about other suitable mirror entities.

Having asked, Lumian immediately employed Magnified Fate, gaining a sharper view of Bloody Jack's fate for the next ten seconds.

Feigning nervousness, he moved his right hand as if to touch his face.

He Magnified a fate tributary!

Two to three seconds later, Bloody Jack's thoughts reached Lumian through the connection forged by the Mystical Language of Fate.

“Pull me out of the mirror!”

Lumian raised his eyebrows and stepped forward twice, extending his right hand toward the mirror hovering above the altar.

The moment his finger touched the glass mirror, he felt it dissolve into nothingness.

As Lumian fully inserted his palm into the mirror, a cold, damp, and distinctly sticky hand abruptly grasped his wrist.

Chapter 710 "Communication"

Lumian wasn't surprised when his wrist was grabbed by the wet hand.

He even chuckled. "Not bad. You only stained my wrist, not corrupt my entire arm."

As he spoke, he pulled back with all his might, feeling the abnormally heavy force opposing him.

Lumian's muscles swelled, and his body appeared to grow slightly larger.

At last, he saw the bloody figure in the jacket being dragged out of the empty mirror.

A bluish-black mist materialized, permeating the faux goatskin containing the ominous contract.

The contract burst into flames on its own, morphing into silver-black symbols and words. They linked together from end to end, creating an intricate and illusory pattern that abruptly passed through his clothes and settled between Lumian's chest and abdomen.

Having pulled Bloody Jack out of the mirror, Lumian had fulfilled the other party's request, and the contract was automatically fulfilled!

At that instant, Bloody Jack, who had regained his footing in front of the altar, raised his head.

His mutilated face turned towards Lumian as he lifted the blood-dripping axe with both hands.

Lumian's eyes, tinged with an iron-black hue, mirrored a two-toned figure of Bloody Jack.

One was a vivid red, enveloping every crevice of Bloody Jack's body, permeating every inch of space. The other was a pale white, no larger than a thumb. It was located at Bloody Jack's abdomen, enveloped by layers of bright red.

Much like Padre Cali in his untransformed Wraith state, he has only one vulnerability from head to toe, but it's not in his Spirit Body; it's concealed within his physical form... This seems to be composed of viscous blood. Regardless of the extent of damage or blood loss it endures, as long as the core remains unharmed, it will be unaffected... It bears some resemblance to the Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway, but it possesses mirror-related capabilities... As Lumian observed, a succession of thoughts calmly raced through his mind.

Bloody Jack's red spiderweb-like eyes displayed a ruthless and bloodthirsty expression. He raised his axe and swung it at Lumian's body.

The deal is done. Now, I'm going to kill you!

Bang!

The axe missed Lumian and hit the ground of the quarry cave, creating a deep fissure and sending gravel and dirt flying.

With a twisted flexibility that exceeded human limits, Lumian maneuvered behind Bloody Jack.

With a swift motion of his arm, Lumian punched out with his right fist.

Blazing white flames surged forth, a bright tail enveloping his fist and wrapping around his forearm.

Pfft! Lumian's fist felt as if it had plunged into a swamp. The deeper he went, the more muddy and sticky it became.

Rumble! He detonated the blazing white flames surrounding his fist, blasting open a passageway.

His fist and forearm sank into Bloody Jack's cavity, halting at the pale-white spot.

Just as Bloody Jack was about to turn around and swing his axe, he froze. His body rapidly disintegrated, turning into congealed blood that fell to the ground.

The blood clots writhed and reassembled into Bloody Jack, but there was still a gap in his abdomen that couldn't be filled.

Seeing this, Lumian's body ignited with a blazing white flame, ready to attack with all his might.

Bloody Jack instantly turned ethereal and retreated into the mirror on the altar.

Lumian chuckled and abandoned the pursuit, ending the summoning ritual at a moderate pace.

His objective had been achieved. He had acquired the contracted ability—Mirror Mark!

Previously, he had observed Bloody Jack's river of fate not to gather information about it, but to verify if this strange creature from the bloody world possessed godhood!

If Bloody Jack didn't have godhood, Lumian could complete some risky transactions with him to circumvent the requirement of 99 living sacrifices. If Bloody Jack had godhood, he would undoubtedly suffer a backlash. However, he was protected by the ritual and under Mr. Fool's gray fog's supervision, so he wouldn't be significantly affected.

It was precisely because he was aware of this that Lumian dared to agree to drag Bloody Jack out of the mirror, allowing him to no longer be restricted by the ritual.

It turned out that as long as the contracted party could communicate normally, the price to pay when signing the contract would be significantly lower.

Of course, there was no way to avoid the negative effects entirely. Although Lumian obtained the Mirror Mark, it would also make him more susceptible to attracting abnormal events and strange dangers related to mirrors.

As the crack created by Bloody Jack spread to the wall of spirituality, causing it to gradually disintegrate, Franca took the opportunity to curiously inquire about what had just transpired.

Lumian gave a brief account of his “negotiation” with Bloody Jack and smiled.

“I worked hard to reach Sequence 5 so that these evil creatures would be able to communicate with me calmly.”

Franca couldn't resist laughing. “You call that calm?”

With a sigh, she said, “If it weren't for dealing with Moran Avigny, the Mirror Mark wouldn't be a wise choice. You wouldn't have much use for it normally. It's like wasting a contract slot.”

This was due to Lumian's lack of mirror-related abilities. Without a fixed mirror world entrance, he couldn't pass through mirrors, let alone use the Mirror Mark to locate his target.

Lumian wasn't bothered by it.

“The Sealed Artifact corresponding to the Hisoka Beyonder characteristic might have the ability to transform into a Wraith. The Mirror Mark could be used to complement it.”

“Let's hope that's the case,” Franca said, sighing. “This is why Contractees can't compare to Shepherds. Once you sign a contract and gain an ability, you're stuck with it. Even if that ability becomes useless, it still takes up a slot and brings the associated negative effects.”

Many contracted abilities were acquired to fulfill specific needs for a limited time. After that period, they often became useless. For instance, Lumian's Niese Face could only be used occasionally as an illusion during combat after he obtained the Lie earring.

Lumian smiled. “Who says I can't get rid of it?”

“Uh...” Franca was caught off guard.

Lumian's lips curved into a bright smile.

“Kill the contract target, and the contract will automatically be nullified.”

Franca and Jenna gasped inwardly.

After a moment, Franca joked, “Very good. Keep that smile. That's the smile of a homicidal maniac—no, a Reaper.”

Jenna nodded thoughtfully. “No wonder you didn't kill Bloody Jack just now and only scared it away. You were worried that the newly acquired abilities would vanish instantly. Didn't you mention you were planning to contract three abilities this time? Have you thought about the other two?”

“Yes.” Lumian wasn't in a rush to complete the second ritual. He casually chatted, “One is to boost my defense or substitution abilities, while the other is to handle undead creatures. However, I'll need to think about the latter later.”

The former addressed his lack of physical defense, while the latter made up for his insufficient means to deal with Wraiths and undead creatures.

“Substitution abilities...” Franca said, smiling. “Just sign a contract with a Wraith or specter formed by a Demoness or a Mid-Sequence Seer Beyonder after their death.”

Lumian scoffed.

“Do you think I haven't considered that? However, apart from the Demoness evil spirit suspected to be a Saint, there's nothing related to Demonesses or Seers. I definitely can't handle the negative effects of a demigod contractor at my current level.”

“Maybe it's manageable,” Franca's eyes sparkled. “Maybe the adverse effects will only change your gender.”

“What do you mean ‘only’?” Lumian wanted to tease Franca for her “life is short, why not give it a shot” mindset, but he restrained himself in front of Jenna.

Franca suddenly had a thought. “Can you only sign contracts with spirit world creatures or strange creatures? Can you sign one with a human? I can share the Mirror Substitution ability with you.”

This was the first time Lumian had considered this question. After thinking for a moment, he said, “The relevant mysticism knowledge doesn't forbid it... But never mind. The Inevitability contract might have some hidden corruption or influence.”

“That's true.” Franca was still rational.

As she responded, another question popped into her mind.

If I actually sign a contract with him, what kind of negative effects will I inflict on Lumian?

“Why does the ability to deal with the undead have to wait?” Jenna wasn't as quick-witted as Franca, so she could only focus on more practical matters.

Lumian chuckled. “Because spirit world creatures and strange creatures fear sunlight's purification and don't have similar abilities, I can only consider obtaining it from the death domain. There's a good contract target there.”

“Armored Shadow?” Franca realized. “Are you worried that giving him too much gold will make future communication uncontrollable?”

Lumian nodded and replied, “Additionally, I'm also waiting for the Sealed Artifact made from the Hisoka Beyonder characteristic. If it's related to a Wraith, I won't need the corresponding contract ability.”

After chatting for a while, Lumian reconstructed the wall of spirituality and began his second summoning.

This time, he summoned: “A peculiar creature wandering above the world, an unimaginably sturdy being, a colossal creature that never rests.”

After reciting the incantation, a “peak” made of layers of flesh appeared at the mysterious door.

Its height was unknown, but it couldn't fully emerge, causing the illusory and mysterious door to shake.

After speaking the Mystical Language of Fate, Lumian obtained the corresponding information.

This “mountain of flesh” indeed possessed the ability to enhance one's defense. It could toughen one's body to be like steel or rock, but the corresponding downside was having a movement speed as slow as that of an ordinary turtle.

Lumian had no choice but to give up.

His alternative target was his messenger, Penitent Baynfel.

According to the messenger information provided by Madam Magician, Baynfel had the ability to bring his shadow to life and switch positions with his body at critical moments.