

Inevitability 711

Chapter 711 Choice

Since he was summoning his messenger, Lumian didn't perform the ritual in Mr. Fool's name. He simply called forth Penitent Baynfel, who was garbed in a black clergyman's robe, resembling a charred corpse with black flames clinging to his body.

“I wish to enter into another contract with you,” Lumian requested with a smile.

He briefly recounted the power of Inevitability, the special contract, the sharing of abilities, the potential price, and the negative effects, awaiting Baynfel's decision.

Baynfel stayed silent for a few moments before responding in a deep voice, “If you're not worried about the downsides, I have no objections.”

“What might the negative effects be?” Lumian inquired cautiously.

In Baynfel's empty, dark eye sockets, the dark flames that served as his eyes flickered twice.

“That hinges on your choice. I can let you finalize the contract. Once you know the specific negative effects, you can decide if you want to seal the deal.”

Different choices lead to different negative effects? What choices? Lumian spoke the Mystical Language of Fate, filled with curiosity and puzzlement, allowing the silver-black symbols, words, and patterns to land on the faux goatskin, forming a short, powerful, mysterious, and sinister contract document.

Through the connection forged by the Mystical Language of Fate, Lumian sensed Baynfel's traits and abilities.

The Penitent's powers were intimately tied to shadows and darkness, but most of them seemed to be submerged in murky depths. Lumian could sense their presence, but he couldn't discern their nature.

The two abilities floating above the surface were Shadow Animation and Spirit World Traversal. Their characteristics were Ancient Corpse.

Perfect, Shadow Animation is just what I need... Baynfel probably showcased it specifically for me... He's quite unique, completely different from spirit world entities like Headless Bride, Abscessed Hand, and Human-Faced Mantis... It's much more straightforward to truly communicate with him... As Lumian mused, he gained a deeper understanding of Shadow Animation.

This was an active ability that could animate the shadows of oneself and others. The former could be used to swap places with the body and evade fatal damage when dodging was impossible. The latter would ensnare the corresponding target, hindering their movements, but it couldn't inflict much harm or completely restrain the opponent.

Activating it swiftly to produce instantaneous effects was its greatest strength. Otherwise, it couldn't shield from death or injury. Its drawback was that it could only maintain the activation of one shadow at a time.

As a substitute, if the animated shadow perished, Lumian would have to wait for the sun to rise or set before the shadow would reappear. Shadowless individuals would be deathly afraid of sunlight and instinctively dread it.

In the past, my emotions and desires were volatile, and now I'm piling on a fear of sunlight? If I really run into Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Sun pathway in the future, won't I be too terrified to even open my eyes? Thankfully, this is a downside that only kicks in after losing the shadow substitute. It's not permanent... Lumian looked at Baynfel and asked sincerely, "What sacrifice do you require? Or rather, what price must I pay?"

So far, he still hadn't figured out the negative repercussions of signing a contract with Baynfel.

Penitent Baynfel, with only a thin layer of charred skin clinging to his bones, replied, "Any mystical item in your possession."

Any one... Is this the so-called choice? Picking a mystical item to offer directly shapes the ultimate negative effects? Lumian had an epiphany as he took stock of the mystical items he carried.

His knee-jerk thought was the Pride Armor. After all, he couldn't effectively use the Sealed Artifact at present. However, looking at Baynfel's charred corpse, he felt that he wasn't just sacrificing an item but attempting to off his messenger. Furthermore, while he couldn't use the Pride Armor for now, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony could. Lumian had already taught them the corresponding usage techniques.

At the crux of it all was a single mantra: Don't wear it yourself. Only utilize the negative effects by letting the target trigger them!

As for proactively triggering higher-level negative effects in exchange for indiscriminate areof-effect damage, there was no way to teach that. It had to be improvised based on the environment and the enemy's traits. After all, Demonesses likely relished this method. It was brutally effective in bullying targets without substitute-type abilities!

Mystery Prying Glasses, Flog boxing gloves, Eye of Truth, Lie earring, Mr. K's finger, Symphony of Hatred bone flute, Fury of the Sea brooch, Traveler's Bag, Omebella's umbilical cord remains, expired misfortune gold coins and unlucky banknotes, Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic... Lumian went through these items one by one.

Excluding non-mystical items and ones that were very handy to him at the moment, Lumian ultimately decided to choose between the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth.

Their abilities overlapped to a degree. Keeping one sufficed.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian opted to offer the Eye of Truth to Baynfel.

He believed that the Mystery Prying Glasses had fewer negative effects than the Eye of Truth when usage time was limited. Furthermore, the Eye of Truth could only see the truth. The Mystery Prying Glasses could at least be used to paint supernatural works and disguise himself. After Lumian became an Ascetic, he could effectively rein in the urge to paint while donning the Mystery Prying Glasses. He could paint as needed or abstain.

Lumian produced the peculiar Eye of Truth and handed it to Baynfel.

Just as Baynfe! grasped the eyewear, which appeared entwined with flesh and blood vessels, Lumian suddenly sensed the downside of signing the contract.

In scenes closely tied to Baynfe!'s past, he would witness truths better left unseen.

However, it's fine if such effects only happen when it involves this messenger's enigmatic background. Otherwise, I would have cut today's ritual short and made a new choice after finding a suitable contract partner... In Aurore and Franca's words, seeing what shouldn't be seen is a death sentence... Lumian pondered for a moment and replied to Baynfe! in a deep voice, "The contract stands."

As he finished speaking, the short and sinister contract spontaneously ignited without fire, transforming into silver-black symbols, words, and patterns that seared onto Lumian's arm.

Lumian glanced down at his shadow and saw it warp on its own, as if performing a powerful dance.

A smile spread across Lumian's face.

After about ten seconds, his shadow settled.

Lumian expressed his gratitude to Baynfe! and ended the summoning, stowing away all the items on the altar.

"It's done?" Franca asked eagerly.

It wasn't that she doubted Lumian couldn't even handle his messenger, but she worried the nature of his abilities might not meet the requirements or come with too many strings attached.

Lumian nodded and briefly recounted the situation with Shadow Animation.

As he walked towards the quarry cave's exit, he said to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "Now, we can hatch a plan to deal with Moran Avigny.

"Franca, contact the Demoness of Black and let her know we're about to make our move. However, to avoid spooking the family and hidden forces behind Moran Avigny, she doesn't need to observe nearby for now. Just request an emergency help charm from her that can contact her through a mirror if the Mirror People have hidden allies. Yes, it's a golden opportunity to test the Demoness of Black's stance towards the Tamara family and the Mirror People. Also, inform the Eternal Blazing Sun Church that they can get ready to cut us some slack.

"Jenna, write to Madam Judgment and clue her in on our plan in the event the Demoness of Black is in bed with the Mirror People.

"Anthony..."

Lumian's mind raced as he considered various details and doled out missions to his companions.

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony didn't just passively accept their tasks. They actively chimed in with ideas and helped Lumian fill in gaps and polish his brainstorming.

Upon returning to Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai, Anthony ducked out early to keep up appearances at the Trier Psychiatrist Guild. Jenna, meanwhile, changed into a dark black cloaked dress and seized the chance to play the part of a Witch.

Soon, only Lumian and Franca remained in the apartment's living room.

The atmosphere grew awkward, and a prolonged silence hung in the air.

Lumian broke the ice as if nothing had happened.

“How's Jenna coming along with digesting the Witch potion?”

Franca breathed a sigh of relief and said, “Not bad. She's found her groove acting as a Witch. Ask around the market district and you'll hear whispers of Witches appearing in the dead of night to punish rowdy drunkards. Some claim to have fallen into an icy river. Some wake up the next day aching all over, while others get splitting headaches come evening and don't dare drink anymore. What they have in common is they all ran into someone dressed as a Witch. Yes, some drunkards even vanished into thin air...”

Franca's voice trailed off, replaced by a tone fit for telling ghost stories.

“The missing ones committed serious offenses? The others are guilty of beating their families, harassing passersby, and groping women?” Lumian guessed with a smile, based on his read of Jenna.

“Bingo.” Franca nodded with a bright smile.

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, “Aren't you worried the Demoness of Black will catch wind of this rumor and send someone to investigate?”

Franca felt smug and pointed at herself.

“You're looking at her! Me! In the Demoness Sect, I'm the one handling matters tied to the market district!”

She then sighed and said, “Jenna is a natural. She whipped up a solid acting plan in under a month. Maybe she can digest the Witch potion before I advance to Affliction.”

“If those incidents hadn't happened, she would've been a star actress. Acting is second nature to her,” Lumian agreed.

The two fell silent again.

After a few seconds, Franca put on a brave face and said, “Um, um, you can't breathe a word to Jenna or anyone else about what I said or did near the altar in the mirror world!”

Lumian asked in confusion, “Did you say or do anything out of the ordinary back there?”

“I don't recall...”

Franca was taken aback for a moment before flashing an understanding smile.

She stood up with a breezy grin and walked to Lumian's side. She patted his shoulder gratefully and said, “What a bro!”

She felt all the awkwardness had evaporated.

A few days later, as Moran Avigny attended an interministerial meeting, Lumian appeared near the government-provided villa.

Chapter 712 “Accusation”

Lumian stood beside Moran Avigny's villa, wearing a wide-brimmed round hat and a black tweed coat. He gazed at the garden, its few withered leaves rustling in the breeze, and said to Franca, “Keep your distance later.”

As he spoke, Lumian's eyes turned silver-black once more, allowing him to observe the fate tributaries corresponding to Franca's future.

The tributary tainted with a faint black color was unrelated to their upcoming infiltration. Given the current circumstances, sneaking into Moran Avigny's villa and leaving a Mirror Mark on the full-body mirror in his study didn't seem to pose a high risk of death.

However, Lumian knew better than to let his guard down. After using the Eye of Calamity several times, he understood that a single black fate tributary didn't necessarily mean there was only one hidden death calamity lurking.

According to Franca, numerous death calamities were concealed further along the fate tributary, too blurry for Lumian to discern or differentiate.

In other words, even though there was presently just one faintly black-tainted fate tributary connected to their infiltration of Moran Avigny's villa, when Franca made her decision and tried to enter, transforming the harmless fate tributary into the main path, a black tributary symbolizing a deadly calamity might still emerge.

Lumian's profound realization about this was: The fate of the future was variable and ever-evolving. Of course, certain aspects were destined to remain constant. For instance, death was the inevitable fate awaiting most humans.

“No need to worry, I'm not new to this,” Franca assured him, confident in her infiltration skills.

Assassin 101: Infiltration!

Without another word, Lumian activated the mark and morphed into a shadow creature, melding into the shadows cast by the garden's plants.

Franca stepped forward and disappeared into the wind-stirred shadows.

The pair swiftly and stealthily made their way to the side of the villa.

At the same time, Moran Avigny was attending a ministerial meeting. His wife had gone to an art salon with her lady's maid, leaving only a handful of valets, maids, gardeners, and chefs in the villa.

The Avigny family didn't live there. Only the immediate family of the Minister of Industry was permitted to reside in the government-provided villa long-term. Moran Avigny's three children had either already married and moved out or were attending university in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. They only returned home on weekends.

For Lumian and Franca, this was when the target location's security was at its most vulnerable. After all, Moran Avigny was the VIP. The covert protection detail would undoubtedly stick close to him.

Lumian emerged from the shadows in the corner and instructed Franca,

“Wait here and keep an eye out for any trouble.”

“Got it!” Franca agreed without protest.

Lumian concentrated on the Demoness of Pleasure's fate tributary for a few moments before shifting back into a shadow creature and silently slipping into Moran Avigny's villa.

He couldn't view his own future fate, even with the aid of a mirror. His only option was to infer his fate by watching his companions.

Franca concealed herself in the shadows and patiently waited.

It wasn't long before Lumian reached Moran Avigny's study, navigating it as if it were his own home. He had witnessed Moran Avigny use the full-body mirror there to access the mirror world on multiple occasions.

As for his familiarity with the layout, that was thanks to the detailed security map provided by 007.

The winter sunlight around 4 p.m. was dim. The study was a mix of light and darkness, evoking a strong sense of dusk. The silence had long been a constant melody in this space.

Lumian meticulously searched the study from within the shadows but found no traps or hidden individuals.

Only then did he revert to his human form, breaking free from the shadows and reappearing in front of the full-body mirror.

As the black mark activated, Lumian reached out his right palm and pressed it against the cold, hard glass.

A blood-colored handprint instantly materialized, reversed from Lumian's right palm as if it belonged to someone else.

The inverted, sinister blood-colored palm print quickly faded, blending into the mirror and vanishing.

Just as Lumian was about to pull his right palm back and leave, a hand abruptly extended from the full-body mirror and seized his wrist.

The hand was a healthy white, with long, powerful fingers.

It yanked with tremendous force, catching Lumian off guard and sending him crashing into the glass mirror.

At some point, the mirror had turned ethereal, shedding its corporeal form. Lumian's vision went dark before illuminating to reveal numerous dark passageways resembling a spiderweb.

In the area corresponding to the current mirror, an ordinary-looking man stood at the edge. He raised his brass revolver, aimed it at Lumian, and pulled the trigger.

Clad in a dark tweed suit and a half top hat, with a glass-like cufflink fastened to his sleeve, he wore a faint smile, as if mocking Lumian for not anticipating the possibility of Moran Avigny's bodyguard hiding in the mirror.

Bang!

A bullet gleaming with ghostly green light shot towards Lumian.

Lumian's figure abruptly vanished. The bullet struck the afterimage he left behind and flew into one of the dark, empty tunnels.

In the next instant, Lumian swiftly materialized behind the ambusher and, without hesitation, harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot out from his nose and struck the ambusher.

The ambusher's eyes snapped shut, and he crumpled to the ground.

Midway through, his eyes darted around and he snapped out of his daze.

Thud! He crashed to the ground, transforming his body into a shadow.

The shadows disintegrated and spread in all directions, entering various dark tunnels.

Immediately after, the ambusher stealthily materialized in an empty passageway, his form shrouded in faint white fog.

Lumian's figure was reflected in his misty eyes. Before Lumian could sense it and turn to look, the ambusher spoke in a strange language that could stir the forces of nature, "You're guilty!"

Lumian had never encountered this language, but he clearly understood its meaning. His body suddenly froze, as if under an invisible restriction.

The ambusher opened his mouth again.

"You blasphemer!"

Suddenly, the entire mirror world froze, and the dark, ethereal passageways transformed into tiny amber insects.

Once again, Lumian heard a terrifying voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance.

Vaguely, he "saw" three figures.

The three figures sat cross-legged, one facing left, one looking straight ahead, and the other looking right. Their hands were in different postures.

One was heavy, one real, and one ethereal. They were in three different states, constantly moving, changing, and interchanging around a silver circle.

A majestic and resounding voice reverberated, causing Lumian's mind to buzz as he lost consciousness.

Amidst the blurry, vivid pain, the dazed Lumian felt a familiar burning sensation on his left chest. His right palm alternated between burning and freezing.

Gradually, he regained consciousness.

In a dark tunnel that had solidified, the ambusher witnessed silver-black warts erupting from Lumian's body, emitting sinister patterns that resembled viscous liquid. At some point, a strange, cold wind swept through the surroundings. Darkness squirmed in the depths of the different tunnels, as if a monster was about to crawl out.

The ambusher's body stiffened, becoming increasingly sluggish, with a faint white fog barely discernible within.

After an unknown period of time, the man finally survived the most dangerous moment. He felt his body again and regained his vision and hearing.

As Lumian's warts and patterns faded, the ambusher instinctively felt a lingering fear.

How did he commit blasphemy?

Which deity did he blaspheme against?

Why didn't he lose control?

I've never encountered such a situation before!

The Beyonder powers possessed by the ambusher allowed him to discern the target's crimes and "accuse" him of various charges. The damage and effects of different crimes were completely different, and the accuser couldn't predict them beforehand. They could only make a guess based on their experience from previous "cases."

This was the first time the ambusher had encountered a situation where he nearly succumbed to the overflowing influence of the deity after the sinner was punished by a deity for blasphemy!

Fortunately, he recovered before the target.

The ambusher raised the brass revolver once more and aimed it at Lumian, who was hunched over in pain.

Just as he pulled the trigger, Lumian's head snapped up, his expression contorted with ferocity.

Bang!

A bullet shimmering with starlight shot out from the muzzle, locked onto the target's body.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian's shadow came to life and flipped upward.

Crack!

The black shadow shattered like a mirror. Along with the starlight, it caved in and was obliterated.

After briefly disappearing, Lumian materialized behind the ambusher and harrumphed once more.

He had used Shadow Animation in time, and the shadow had triggered Franca's Mirror Substitution!

This was why Lumian had Franca infiltrate the villa and stay outside. Relying on Mirror Substitution required maintaining a certain distance.

It turned out his shadow could also share Mirror Substitution!

Two beams of white light shot out, causing the ambusher to close his eyes again.

This time, Lumian didn't give the enemy a chance to quickly wake up. He extended his right foot and blocked the enemy, preventing him from falling.

Simultaneously, he drew his revolver and pressed it against the target's forehead.

The ambusher's eyes darted around, and he awoke to the terrifying pressure emanating from the muzzle.

He forced a smile, handed over his revolver, and whispered, "I'll give this to you. Can you let me go?"

Lumian's thoughts raced as he took the revolver and nodded. "Okay."

He then holstered his revolver.

The ambusher maintained a humble and ingratiating smile as he turned around and walked deeper into the dark tunnel.

Suddenly, Lumian heard Termiboros's magnificent voice.

"It's best not to let him go."

Uh... Lumian's eyes narrowed as he instantly sensed something was off.

Why did I agree to that deal just now?

Why would I let him go?

Chapter 713: Between White and Black

Warned by Termiboros, Lumian sensed something was off.

The ambusher was slowly making his exit, as if concerned that moving too fast would prematurely alert Lumian to the abnormality. Strangely, no massive vortex emerged from the dark, empty tunnel's depths, stopping the ambusher, who had already gone in, from getting pulled into another mirror.

As he watched him go, Lumian glanced at his restored shadow, put away the brass revolver taken from the enemy, and pulled out the Flog boxing gloves from his Traveler's Bag. He put them on at a measured pace.

A moment later, blazing white flames engulfed Lumian's body as he transformed into a fiery spear that hurtled towards the ambusher's back.

The ambusher's fears came to pass. He quickly evaded, ready to turn into a shadow and escape into the dark tunnel's depths with five decoys. Then he would trigger Mirror Traversal and get away entirely, returning to a pre-selected mirror.

Just then, as the flames making up the burning white spear dissipated, Lumian appeared.

The ambusher's shadow came alive, ensnaring the body that hadn't fully transformed into a shadow, briefly keeping it from dividing into six separate forms. It was forced to remain in place.

Lumian advanced and dashed in front of the terrified ambusher. He alternated punches, starting the Flogging.

Bang!

Lumian's initial punch heightened the ambusher's fear, and the target narrowly freed himself from his shadow's entanglement.

Bang!

Lumian's next punch instantly set off the enemy's already tense fear.

This wasn't chance; the ambusher's fear clearly exceeded normal levels in this situation. Lumian, his eyes silver-black, foresaw the corresponding future and exploited this vulnerability. Fear played out in his mind as he punched.

Thus, the first punch worsened the situation, and the second significantly raised the odds, successfully triggering the fear.

The ambusher went rigid, heart briefly ceasing from the detonating fear. His mind blanked, and blood poured from his nose.

Seeing this, Lumian took out the ritual sheepskin from his Traveler's Bag and threw it over the ambusher's head.

Right after, he spoke the activation incantation in Hermes: "Sheep!"

Amid a dark flash, the ambusher turned into a sheep with light white and gray wool.

Lumian stared at the fearful sheep with bloodshot eyes. Removing the Flog boxing gloves and returning them to his Traveler's Bag, he grinned and said, "So, you think I'll release you for a measly gun?"

Lumian then stooped down, scooped up the limp sheep, and went back to the mirror in Moran Avigny's study, trying to exit.

Unable to enter or leave mirrors, he wasn't certain he could depart so simply. If not, he would utilize the pre-prepared Mirror Mark and Spirit World Traversal to go directly to the unique, permanent mirror world exit in Underground Trier. Then he would teleport to locate Franca. This would avert any issues behind the mirror.

Lumian's vision faded and brightened as he emerged in Moran Avigny's study with the frightened sheep.

He rushed to the window and warily opened it. Sure enough, Franca had exited the shadows and waited by the small windowsill.

Realizing Lumian's Mirror Substitution had shattered, Franca quickly chose to investigate and check if her partner required aid.

"You okay?" Franca whispered.

"We'll discuss it later." Lumian threw her the sheep.

Franca promptly caught the sheep and vanished into the shadows with it.

In no rush to go, Lumian donned gloves and took care of the various traces he had left behind.

Soon, Franca returned, using the Primordial Demoness figurine, her mirror, and Demoness black magic to handle the anti-divination and anti-prophecy part.

In an abandoned tunnel close to the permanent mirror world entrance in Underground Trier,

Franca, now fully briefed by Lumian, eyed the quivering sheep and said eagerly, "How should we question it? Should I ready a mechanical typewriter like last time?"

"But we've run out of truth serum."

Anthony, sans gold-rimmed glasses and back in veteran garb, gazed at the sheep for a couple seconds before responding, "I'll talk with him."

"Should we step out first?" Jenna asked out of caution.

Anthony agreed with a nod.

"I don't mind you observing, but he'll feel more at ease with less people, facilitating communication."

Concerned our attendance will scare him and impact the Hypnotism? Lumian spun around pensively and exited the sealed dark tunnel alongside Franca and Jenna.

Soon, the sheep appeared with Anthony, no longer as scared and nervous.

"You may cancel the Animal Creation Spell," Anthony told Lumian, smiling. "He realizes we're acting in his best interest and wishes to assist. Provided we avoid topics that will impact his faith in a deity and directly affect his life, he'll speak honestly and amiably."

The sheep nodded gravely, confirming Anthony's words.

Lumian faced Franca and Jenna, seeing matching emotions in their eyes.

A Hypnotist is truly terrifying!

A Spectator is truly terrifying!

Indeed... Lumian reflected inwardly.

Looking at the sheep, he uttered the Hermes incantation: "His Grace."

With a dark flicker, the sheepskin automatically vanished, and the ambusher materialized before Lumian and the others, half-crouched.

Putting away the sheepskin, Lumian inquired with a smile, "What's your name?"

"Jebus Lata," the ambusher answered nonchalantly, like talking to a buddy.

Holding the carbide lamp, Lumian warmly asked, "Were you guarding Moran Avigny?"

"Yes," Jebus Lata replied frankly. "Mainly to conceal myself behind the mirror and watch the outside. Also to prevent mirror world mishaps and ensure Moran Avigny isn't found out and ambushed when he uses it to do specific things in various locations."

Security is fairly tight. No clear weak points... Franca muttered, taking the lead in displaying her Demoness of Pleasure charm. Grinning, she asked, "Which organization do you belong to?"

Jebus's eyes were drawn to Franca as he reflexively answered,

"The School of Truth."

"Truth?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.

Jebus didn't face him, gaze flitting between the two Demonesses.

"Yes, Truth."

Growing serious, he addressed Franca and Jenna in a proselytizing tone, "What do you believe this world's backdrop is?"

Without waiting for the Demonesses' response, he continued, "It's not white or black. Not light or darkness.

"It's the gray between white and black, the mist between light and darkness.

It's shadows, flux, and chaos!"

Traits of the corresponding pathway? Well-versed in mysticism, Lumian thoughtfully switched gears.

"Are you aware of Moran Avigny's identity?"

This was their top priority now.

Jebus nodded casually, as if conversing with a friend.

"I am. He's part of the Tamara family but was swapped with a Mirror Person from Underground Trier."

"Then why collaborate with him still?" Franca probed.

Jebus chuckled.

"Didn't I just say?"

"This world's backdrop isn't white or black, but gray. If cooperating with Mirror People lets me reach my aim, why not?"

"What's the School of Truth after?" Lumian swiftly queried.

Jebus peered at Franca's face and lake-blue eyes, stating, "We seek to leverage Moran Avigny and other elites to slowly seize control of Intis's government, letting this nation have order yet shadows, plus a conduit for ordered communication and shadows.

"We honor the law, but that won't stop us from uncovering legal loopholes and employing select methods to settle matters pre-litigation.

"That's our ideology."

Jebus seemed to preach to the Demonesses.

How ambitious... Jenna sighed inwardly.

Smiling, Lumian asked, "Why control the government?"

"To practice and near the truth, a rite to please it," Jebus responded fanatically.

"Plus, we must use Intis's government and others to locate three things."

"What three?" Franca inquired curiously.

Jebus gladly obliged her.

"One, clues to fallen heaven. It's in the underground ancient sealed city. Only by controlling Intis's government can we fully unseal it."

Fallen heaven... What's that? Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony shared looks, realizing none had heard the term.

Jebus went on, "Two, Roselle's final mausoleum."

Emperor Roselle's mausoleum? Lumian's pupils widened.

Franca asked eagerly, "Got any clues?"

"I don't know." Jebus shook his head honestly. "At minimum, I've got zero leads on Roselle's tomb. No idea if the Overseers have found anything."

Overseer... Lumian and the rest committed the title to memory.

Jebus glanced from Franca to Jenna, then back to Franca.

"Three, a lamp. The Magic Wishing Lamp."

Magic Wishing Lamp? Lumian checked Franca, seeing the Demoness of Pleasure also looked blank.

Smiling, Jebus added with a showy air, "The Magic Wishing Lamp is a Sealed Artifact.. Its number is: 0-05!"

Chapter 714: The Fractured Tamara Family

Jebus eagerly observed Franca and Jenna after mentioning 0-05, hoping to witness expressions of shock and terror on their faces.

Considering the immense power demonstrated by this Beyonder team, they surely grasped the gravity of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact!

It was a horrifying object capable of obliterating not just Trier, but potentially the whole world!

The higher the serial number of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, the more dangerous it would be.

And now, they were talking about 0-05!

While Franca and Jenna were intrigued and surprised, their reaction didn't match Jebus's expectations.

Instead of responding to Jebus, they turned their attention to Lumian.

Despite not having seen or dared to read the details, they had learned from Lumian that Ludwig, the monstrous child, had “stolen” Sealed Artifact information from the Church of Knowledge and given it to Lumian as payment for a deal.

The information pertained to 0-01!

0-05? Lumian raised an eyebrow.

To his knowledge, Sealed Artifacts probably didn't have serial numbers in ancient times. Even if they did, they were individual actions of different Churches. It wasn't until the end of the Fourth Epoch or the beginning of the Fifth Epoch that the seven ruling Churches established the current Sealed Artifact classification rules and numbered the ones under their control.

Among them, due to the immense danger posed by Grade 0 and Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts, the orthodox Churches had agreed to share general information with each other and unify their serial numbers without duplicates.

In other words, it was impossible for both the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Evernight Goddess Church to possess a 0-05 Sealed Artifact.

In the entire world, only the Magic Wishing Lamp could be called 0-05!

When the seven Churches first numbered their Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, they undoubtedly ranked them according to the level of danger, time of appearance, and intrinsic uniqueness. Subsequent acquisitions would be named in the order they were sealed.

This way, there was a high likelihood that the dozens of Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts at the top of the list would adhere to posing greater danger and having greater uniqueness the lower the serial number. For 0-05 to be ranked fifth among the countless Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts spoke volumes about its terrifying power and significance!

Of course, based on these rules, the Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts with the lowest serial numbers might not necessarily be weaker than those with higher serial numbers.

Lumian looked at Jebus and said in a relatively calm tone, “0-05? A terrifying item ranked fifth among all Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts?”

“Indeed,” Jebus replied, his desire to show off finally satisfied.

Lumian inquired curiously, “Does its name, Magic Wishing Lamp, imply that you can make wishes with it?”

At that moment, Lumian's heart swelled with anticipation that surpassed his outward expression.

Jebus nodded solemnly.

“Yes, it can grant the holder any ten wishes.”

Before Lumian could probe further, Jebus added, “However, as far as I know, the fulfillment of those wishes often takes a distorted form or comes with horrifying consequences. Moreover, none

of those who once possessed the divine lamp met a good end. Perhaps Roselle Gustav met his demise because of this.”

Lumian fell silent upon hearing this revelation.

Franca glanced at Lumian and asked, “Did 0-05 once belong to Emperor Roselle?”

Jebus responded without hesitation, “Yes.”

Franca inquired with interest, “What about now? Do you have any leads on 0-05's whereabouts?”

Jebus was eager to share what he knew.

“Yes, it should be with the leader of the secret organization, Element Dawn.

“That leader is believed to be Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette.”

“Wow!” Franca exclaimed in admiration and relief, as if the child of an old friend was thriving after the latter's passing.

Although she and Lumian had learned after the sea prayer ritual that Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette, was alive and had invented fairytale magic, closely linked to the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card, The Hermit, they were unaware of her precise circumstances.

Now, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that Bernadette had become the leader of a secret organization.

Franca had long been familiar with Element Dawn. She knew they focused on studying mysticism and Beyonder alchemy, opposing another knowledge-seeking secret organization, the Moses Ascetic Order. They were primarily active in the Intis region, the south-central zone, and the sea.

“It's only natural for the Emperor's belongings to be with his eldest daughter,” Lumian remarked, feeling somewhat pleased for Emperor Roselle.

Franca asked Jebus excitedly, “Are you planning to confront Bernadette?”

Jebus slowly shook his head.

“We don't have the necessary strength yet. That's one of the reasons we collaborate with the Mirror People.

“Only by embracing and pleasing the truth can the Overseers obtain more boons to resist Bernadette and her subordinates.”

Controlling the government and embracing the truth to varying degrees is a boon-seeking ritual? Yes, Jebus himself mentioned that this is a ritual to please the truth... Their boon-receiving ritual differs from that of other evil god cults. Rather than primarily focusing on blood sacrifices, it emphasizes the influence, utilization, and transformation of order... Lumian summarized a key characteristic of the School of Truth based on Jebus's words.

After a moment of contemplation, he asked, “Overseer is both a position and a name? What's the Sequence equivalent in the potion pathway?”

“Sequence 4, having just attained godhood,” Jebus replied concisely. It was unclear whether he was reluctant to disclose such matters or if he simply didn't know much.

Lumian continued, “We've already grasped your school's philosophy and objectives. What's the purpose of the Mirror People?”

Jebus pondered for a moment before responding, “They also want to break the seal of the ancient underground city. Only by breaking the seal can they enter the depths of the special mirror world where they originally resided and find something of great importance, but it has nothing to do with us.

“They've been allowing more Mirror People to sneak out and replace the originals.

“I'm not sure if they have any other motives.”

“Apart from Moran Avigny, which other Mirror People do you know?” Franca didn't conceal her desire to know the answer.

Jebus shook his head.

“Ever since we reached a collaborative agreement with Moran Avigny, he's had the other Mirror People change their positions and identities. He's the only one who can contact them.”

“How did you discover that Moran Avigny is a Mirror Person?” Lumian sought additional clues.

Jebus chuckled.

“Our School of Truth was founded with some members of the Tamara family as its core. Several of them had long suspected that something was off with Moran Avigny and other clansmen. After receiving the truth's revelation, they confirmed this suspicion.”

“Which pathway does Moran Avigny's original body belong to?” Lumian frowned.

Jebus didn't conceal anything for Moran Avigny's sake.

“The Judgment pathway. Not only does he possess the power of the Judgment pathway, but he can also wield mirror-related powers.”

“Are there any members of the Tamara family's Judgment lineage who don't follow the truth and aren't replaced by Mirror People?” Lumian inquired further.

“Yes, they've cut ties with our School of Truth and have been trying to deal with us,” Jebus replied truthfully.

Wh— The Tamara family first split into two branches, Judgment and Apprentice. Then, the Judgment branch splintered into three parts: those who believe in the truth, those replaced by the Mirror People, and those who adhered to their original traditions... However, the ones with the

connection between the Apprentice branch of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect are more likely to be replaced by the Mirror People. Has that branch also fractured? Why is the Tamara family constantly splintering... Even if the Tamara family doesn't fracture, there's still the risk of being replaced by the Mirror People? Could this stem from some unresolved mysteries of the Fourth Epoch? Lumian analyzed and speculated based on the available information.

“What's Moran Avigny's approximate Sequence?” Jenna asked, noticing Lumian's silence.

“Sequence 5,” Jebus answered Jenna's question with a smile.

Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin... Franca, under the guidance of Madam Judgment, a Major Arcana card holder, was well-versed in the Arbiter pathway.

Sequence 9 was Arbiter, Sequence 8 was Sheriff, Sequence 7 was Interrogator, and Sequence 6 was Judge.

Disciplinary Paladin with mirror magic and mirror world-related abilities... Lumian looked at Jebus and asked with a smile,

“You're not a Mirror Person or a Demoness. Why can you freely enter and exit the mirror world without being affected by the dangers there?”

Jebus pointed at the glass cufflink on his sleeve.

“This is an item given to us by Moran Avigny. It allows us to enter and exit the mirror world and use the connections between mirrors to traverse without being absorbed into other mirrors.

“I can still use it five times.”

Very good. It will be ours in the future... Yes, let's call them Mirror Cufflink.. At that moment, Franca had already thought of a name for the cufflink.

Lumian nodded and replied, “If your abilities correspond to a potion pathway, what would Sequence 9 be called?”

Given the looming potential conflict with the School of Truth, Lumian didn't let the opportunity to understand the other party's Beyonder powers slip away.

A proud smile graced Jebus's face. “It's Broker. We are the gray between white and black, the fog between light and darkness. We are the bridge between order and shadows!”

“Could you say something more comprehensible...” Franca muttered under her breath.

Lumian smiled and asked without hesitation, “What abilities does Broker possess?”

Chapter 715 Shadow Merchant

Jebus reorganized his thoughts and said, "We can become more attuned to certain needs and find suitable candidates to fulfill them. We can also facilitate the corresponding transactions through our words and connections."

With his Conspirer's mind, Lumian pondered seriously for two seconds before fully grasping Jebus's true meaning. Amused, he said, "Put it in simpler terms that are closer to mysticism."

Jebus glanced at Franca and Jenna and eagerly explained, "I have two primary abilities. One is called Gray Perception. I can more acutely sense the gray areas between white and black, including my desire and need to enter that gray domain.

"The other is exceptional eloquence. This includes mastery of language and the ability to observe others' expressions and decipher their words."

"That's it?" Lumian asked, raising his eyebrows.

"That's it," Jebus replied candidly with a shake of his head.

"Don't Brokers charge fees for their services?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

"Before reaching a deal, we will agree on a price with both parties. Sometimes, we don't even ask for one. It's mainly to establish and maintain relationships," Jebus answered seriously. "None of this involves any superpowers."

I had thought a Broker's Beyonder powers could derive corresponding benefits from every transaction they facilitate, including Beyonder enhancements. However, this is clearly an exaggeration. It doesn't seem to belong to Sequence 9... The two abilities Jebus mentioned are very fitting for those at Sequence 9. From the looks of it, Brokers and Spectators are quite similar. They can hardly participate directly in Beyonder battles and are considered more supplementary support... Lumian nodded in enlightenment.

Franca asked with interest, "What's Sequence 8?"

"It's Shadow Merchant," Jebus replied with a smile as he gazed at the Demoness of Pleasure's face.

Without waiting for Franca to inquire further, he took the initiative to explain, "We can detect mysterious creatures and dangerous entities hidden in darkness and shadow while remaining safe from their attacks, thereby allowing us to reach certain deals with them."

Jenna couldn't help but ask, "Invulnerable to hidden mysterious creatures and dangerous entities?"

Isn't this ability too powerful?

Jebus replied with a smile, "That's usually the case, but you can't attack the other party first or secretly exert any influence that's disadvantageous to them. You can't harbor malice when striking a deal, lest the other party discovers it. Furthermore, you'll suffer indiscriminate damage if embroiled in a battlefield. You can't make creatures engaged in combat stand down."

"What if you see something you shouldn't?" Lumian asked after some thought.

“I will endure the corresponding corruption,” Jebus answered without attempting to boast.

“So it seems a Shadow Merchant possesses an aura that prevents nearby creatures from harboring malice towards them?” Franca realized.

Jebus praised, “Madame, your summary is better than mine. However, it's not that you don't generate malice at all, but that you reduce their malice to a certain extent. The higher the other party's level, the weaker the effect. In other words, interacting with those mysterious creatures and dangerous entities to reach a deal is still risky and requires courage.”

At this point, Jebus chuckled.

“Taking risks is a necessary quality for successful merchants.”

“From the looks of it, you embody that?” Lumian deliberately provoked.

“Of course,” Jebus replied proudly. “I've made deals with many dangerous creatures and obtained valuable items. Then, through new deals, I used them to exchange for more useful items from believers of the Great Mother, the Mother Tree of Desire, and other Beyonders. These include bullets that can absorb life, bullets that cause a target's implosion, and bullets that can impregnate a human, among other things.”

Bullets that can impregnate a human... Lumian was suddenly traumatized. He was grateful he hadn't given Jebus a chance to fire that bullet.

Franca and Jenna felt an inexplicable fear, their bodies turning cold. Even Anthony's expression shifted slightly.

Jebus's gaze swept across Franca, Jenna, Lumian, and his friend Anthony. He said solemnly,

“Using our connections with various creatures, we Shadow Merchants can assist you in obtaining anything you desire, as long as you pay a sufficient price.

“Of course, we can't guarantee success in every transaction.”

“I want the Sequence 4 potion formula of the Hunter pathway,” Lumian said with a smile.

Jebus fell silent for a moment before saying, “It will take an extremely long time to find someone who can provide the corresponding formula through multiple intermediaries.

“The one who ultimately makes the deal with you might even pose a danger to you.”

Lumian had only been joking. He deliberately sighed and said, “Then let's put that aside for now.

“What other abilities does a Shadow Merchant possess? Your abilities can't be limited to just reducing the malice of surrounding creatures and detecting hidden entities.”

Jebus finally met Lumian's gaze.

“I've used some of them in my battles with you, including concealing myself in shadows, transforming into a shadow, and creating fake shadows. They're more protective abilities. I collectively call them 'Shadow Utilization.'”

Franca sighed with emotion. “Shadow Merchants can utilize not only symbolic shadows, but also shadows in reality.”

Encouraged, Jebus continued, “We can also sign contracts with the shadows of both parties as witnesses, directly connected to each other's souls. If we violate the contract, the shadows will harm our spirits. It's like a powerful curse.”

“I see...” Franca recalled the fellow she had encountered earlier.

The man, who also appeared to be a member of the School of Truth, had mentioned that he had a way to ensure the binding power of contracts on both parties.

“And then?” Jenna pressed.

Jebus suddenly felt a little embarrassed. He coughed twice and said, “We can also rely on symbolic shadow power to secretly modify key terms the moment the contract is signed, making the other party offer more or less.”

“No wonder...” Franca finally understood how the man suspected of being a member of the School of Truth had deceived her and Jenna.

No wonder he had revealed an abnormality once she mentioned divining the contract in advance!

Shadow Merchants are well-suited for dealing with Beyonders of the Marauder pathway. I wonder which side will ultimately suffer... Lumian didn't give Franca a chance to criticize the Shadow Merchant. He chuckled and questioned, “What about Sequence 7?”

“Sequence 7 is Prosecutor,” Jebus introduced, as if trying to compensate for the Shadow Merchant's dark image. “A Prosecutor has two abilities. One allows them to discern a target's crimes, but they can't witness the process. The other is based on the first ability. First, declare the other party guilty, then point out the specific crime...”

Franca turned puzzled.

“How can this crime be determined?”

“It can't be based on Intis law, can it? If we meet in the Loen Kingdom, won't your abilities be useless?”

“Do they automatically adapt to local laws?”

This seemed to be the first time Jebus had been asked this question. After more than ten seconds of thought, he replied,

“It's likely an act recognized as a crime by most humans. It includes blasphemy, murder, rape, fraud, theft, and so on. Nothing more detailed or categorized.”

Franca remained unconvinced. "That's not right either. Suppose we enter a ridiculous world where we can do whatever we want, including murder and blasphemy. Wouldn't that prevent you from declaring the target guilty?"

She was thinking of the recently concluded Dream Festival.

Jebus fell silent for a moment before responding, "I don't know..."

"Perhaps the charges stem from something more fundamental," Lumian speculated.

Jebus couldn't be certain.

Franca could only look at him and say, "Continue."

Jebus took a moment to recall where he had left off.

"After pointing out the crime, the target will receive the corresponding punishment from the world itself or some entity. The exact punishment depends on the severity of the target's crime. We can't know in advance. In short, from my experience, the most terrifying punishments are immediate death and loss of control on the spot.

"In addition, for ongoing crimes, we can directly declare the target guilty. There's no need to specify the charges, effectively saving time."

Franca nodded slightly, gaining a new understanding of the battle.

"What language did you use when you announced the charge?" Lumian recalled the corresponding details.

"It's the Words of Order. I automatically learned it when I received the Prosecutor's boon," Jebus confessed.

Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment. "What about Sequence 6?"

"It's the Ambitionist," Jebus said, his eyes seeming to blaze with flames. "An inexhaustible ambition brings about a powerful physique, keen perception, and outstanding spirituality, driving us to constantly pursue improvements in our combat abilities. And our burning ambitions make us unwilling to rest for a moment. Unless we're prepared to sleep, no one can force us to sleep or faint..."

"In other words, it can effectively resist being forced into dreams, comas, and other debilitating states? Or is it outright immunity?" Lumian immediately understood why Jebus could wake up so quickly when facing the Spell of Harrumph.

"It's resistance," Jebus admitted candidly.

Lumian inquired further about Ambitionists before asking, "You should be at Sequence 5, right?"

"Yes." Jebus puffed out his chest in front of the two Demonesses.

Franca asked curiously, "What's Sequence 5?"

Jebus replied with a smile, "It's Under the Table."

Under the Table? Franca, Lumian, and the others simultaneously thought of the Authority Holder's Under-the-

table Transaction they had obtained from General Philip.

Could it be formed by the power of a Sequence 5 boon of the Broker pathway?

Lumian gazed at Jebus, in no hurry to comprehend the hidden box's abilities. He asked thoughtfully, "What's your connection to the Carbonari?"

Chapter 716 Bullets

Jebus, who had been about to explain the meaning of "Under the Table," was caught off guard.

"We're putting in a lot of effort to keep the Carbonari in check and have made considerable headway."

The School of Truth member chuckled at that.

"They're attempting to topple the government and create their own system. That's precisely the outcome we hope to see."

Jenna thought Jebus's words didn't add up. "But don't you aim to slowly seize control of the government through high society individuals like Moran Avigny?"

Jebus laughed and adopted an instructive tone.

"A wise merchant wouldn't risk everything on a single venture. The same principle applies to exceptional Ambitionists."

Hearing this, Lumian abruptly shifted the topic.

"From what you've described, Ambitionists primarily enhance their bodies, perception, and spirituality. It doesn't appear to involve their intellect?"

Before Jebus could reply, Franca responded with a grin.

"Who says Ambitionists require intelligence? It's not the same as being a Conspirer. Ambitionists prioritize ambition over the capability to actually achieve it. Exceptional intelligence isn't a prerequisite for them. We've encountered many foolish ambitionists throughout history."

The pair's back-and-forth left Jebus speechless.

Fortunately, Lumian didn't dwell on the subject. He turned the conversation back to the Carbonari.

"Has Albert Goncourt already sided with you?"

"Most likely," Jebus answered uncertainly. "I don't handle the Carbonari."

“Was it because of you Brokers that the Dreamseekers charity group formed ties with the Carbonari?” Lumian thought of General Philip.

Jebus grinned again. “Philip was a man with grand aspirations who had long aimed to bring various secret organizations together. As Brokers, Shadow Merchants, and Ambitionists, we definitely had to help him. Regrettably, while his scheme was successful, others took advantage of him. He also disappeared in the ancient underground city. Incidentally, I'm not sure if you know, but it's actually Fourth Epoch Trier.”

“You guys...” Franca had a thought but kept it to herself. She merely sighed.

Only then did Lumian inquire about Under the Table. “What extra capabilities do you gain at Sequence 5?”

Jebus kept his eyes fixed on the two Demonesses.

“Under the Table is the sole ability, but there are two ways to utilize it:

“The first is to establish an unseen and tranquil Under the Table atmosphere in combat and emergency scenarios. You can forcibly meet your demands by offering the enemy valuable items, but you can't injure them or impact their state in any other way. Additionally, you must behave normally. If not, the enemy who 'agreed' to the under-the-table deal can easily detect that something is amiss and snap out of it.

“Such Under the Table transactions aren't guaranteed to work. The target's inclination and experience in the gray domain determine the success rate. The Broker Sequence's Gray Perception ability can assess this. If you're up against an Unshadowed of the Sun pathway, success is nearly impossible even without the suppression of godhood.”

Unshadowed referred to the Sun pathway's Sequence 4.

Lumian had a realization. “You previously made me release you through such an Under the Table transaction?”

“Correct,” Jebus said frankly. “You have extensive experience with the gray domain and a strong inclination in that respect.”

On Lumian's behalf, Franca complimented Jebus, saying, “You have a talent for reading people!”

“Gray Perception may be an ability acquired as a Sequence 9 Broker, but it's incredibly useful,” Jebus bragged, seeming objective.

Jenna pressed, “And the other Under the Table transaction?”

Jebus answered with a smile, “That requires a certain amount of time. It's not suitable for combat or emergency situations.

“In simple terms, we'll utilize a barely sealed space as the operating target to create a genuine Under the Table scenario. We'll be on one side of the transaction under this

table. The mysterious creature or dangerous entity concealed in the shadows and darkness will be on the other side, but we won't know their identity beforehand. We also won't be able to sense who the other party is during the transaction. It could be an entity we've previously dealt with or one from the unknown.

“Essentially, in this Under the Table state, where you don't know the counter-party or how your needs will be fulfilled through the transaction, you can achieve the desired result by stating your request and offering the item the other party desires. How this is accomplished isn't relevant.”

“Can the transaction only involve two parties?” Jenna asked inquisitively.

“No, it can be a three-way deal, a four-way deal, or even more. Just follow the Under the Table transaction rules.” Jebus didn't hold back on sharing his mysticism knowledge. “The transaction may not succeed either. It depends on the task's difficulty and the limitations of the provided traded items. Also, don't assume those mysterious creatures and dangerous entities will honor their promises. There's no lack of con artists among them who can find ways to circumvent Under the Table's restrictions.”

“Are there additional risks after using Under the Table to complete a particularly challenging task?” Jenna thought of her Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

Jebus nodded gravely.

“Yes, it depends on which mysterious creature or dangerous entity helped you and if it has malicious intentions. I once had a week of misfortune and was almost caught by the Purifiers.”

Jenna nodded pensively and pondered inwardly: It seems the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction is a variant of the standard Under the Table ability. Instead of the counter-party making the requests, it's us offering something valuable. However, it can only simplify complex issues and ease difficult ones. It can't directly complete tasks. There are significant limitations...

The cost of using it is encountering a transaction involving Demons and other sinister beings...

“What information do you have about Overseers?” Lumian posed a new question when he noticed the Under the Table discussion was nearly over.

Jebus appeared troubled and didn't answer.

Seeing this, Lumian switched topics. “What items are you carrying?”

Jebus glanced at Franca and took out a few assorted items from his concealed pocket.

“This is a healing agent obtained from the Great Mother's believers. These are the Coma Gas, Awakening Gas, and Confession Concoction acquired from the Mother Tree of Desire's followers...”

Healing agents, sedatives, mysticism smelling salts, and truth serum. These are all precious items... Lumian gave a small nod at the four metal canisters with various labels.

His gaze then moved to Jebus's other palm, where six bullets rested.

The six bullets were brass, but their surface patterns and colors differed. One looked normal, one had a luminous tip, and one appeared to be corroded by potent acid. One flickered with a dark green light, one radiated a brilliant starlight, and another had a faint luster as if it had been matted many times.

Jebus introduced them with enthusiasm, “These are the Impregnating Bullet, Poison Bullet, Putrid Bullet, Weakening Bullet, Implosion Bullet, and Deprivation Bullet. I traded for them from various deity believers.”

Intrigued, Franca pointed at the ordinary bullet from a distance. “Is this the Impregnating Bullet?”

“Indeed. People and animals shot by it will inevitably become pregnant, and the corresponding symptoms will swiftly manifest,” Jebus said, a tinge of fear in his voice.

“It affects both males and females indiscriminately?” Franca inquired.

“Yes,” Jebus said with certainty.

Huh... Franca made a sound conveying a mix of contempt, fear, and fascination.

Jenna asked worriedly, “It looks like a regular bullet. What if there's a mix-up?”

Jebus shook his head.

“You won't make that mistake. It's lightweight, as if made of wood or soil.”

Phew... Lumian and Anthony let out a sigh of relief.

Lumian pointed at the matte bullet. “Is this the Deprivation Bullet? What does it do?”

The effects of the other bullets seemed straightforward, but Lumian wasn't sure about the Deprivation Bullet's purpose.

“Those struck or grazed by it will lose one Beyonder power within fifteen minutes. As for which one, it's unpredictable,” Jebus answered honestly.

This can complement a Fate Appropriator's abilities of designating the Deprivation... Lumian appraised Jebus and asked, “Do you have any other items? As a Shadow Merchant, don't you possess any mystical objects?”

Jebus explained embarrassedly, “I recently received the Under the Table boon. To complete the corresponding ritual and please truth, I traded all the items I had acquired, leaving only these.

“A merchant's rule is that you can buy and sell anything!”

Poor slob... Franca mocked disappointedly.

She then said to Jebus, "Give us all these items. They're the very reason you've been repeatedly caught up in danger and deity-level conflicts. Hand them over, and you'll be free. Once you're safe, you can start anew."

Similar to Anthony's hypnotic words, Jebus chose to believe it and gave everything to Franca.

After Franca stowed away the items, Lumian surveyed the area and asked, "Where is the School of Truth's headquarters? Which Overseer do you report to?"

Hearing these two questions, Jenna, Franca, and Anthony quietly moved to Lumian's side.

Jebus hesitated for a few seconds and was about to respond when his expression suddenly twisted.

Seeing this, Lumian immediately said to Franca, "Toss the figurine over!"

Franca followed suit. She took out the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine from her Traveler's Bag and threw it to Jebus.

At the same time, she, Anthony, and Jenna grabbed Lumian's shoulders, arms, and other positions.

In the next instant, the four of them disappeared.

Boom!

Jebus exploded from the inside out, his shattered flesh merging with the pale-white fog, transforming into a peculiar blood mist.

The blood fog slowly descended, circling the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine before seeping into the soil.

After a few seconds, Lumian and the others teleported back.

Chapter 717 Supervision?

"Why did he just blow up like that?" Lumian muttered, frowning as he watched the blood slowly soaking into the soil. He gripped the carbide lamp tightly.

His two questions hadn't been intended to end Jebus's life. He had simply wanted to carefully test the limits, one step at a time.

Anthony calmly explained, "The fundamental rule of hypnosis is to never directly threaten the subject's life. So when Jebus was asked something that would seriously endanger him, he either would refuse to answer or the shock would jolt him awake, breaking the hypnotic hold."

"I was ready for the possibility of him breaking free from the hypnosis," Lumian said, having anticipated this outcome.

Jebus couldn't dodge the Spell of Harrumph at that range. Lumian also had three ritualistic dog skins and a cow hide in his Traveler's Bag.

Since becoming an Ascetic, he could now craft the mystical animal hides required for the Animal Creation Spell himself. So he had imbued extra powers into the ones he already possessed.

Thinking back on what had transpired, Jenna mused, "Jebus was going to answer at first... Meaning he didn't think those two questions would put his life at risk. Heh, guess things didn't play out like he expected."

Franca nodded."Exactly. If it was truly dangerous, he could've just stayed quiet.

"I assumed he was under some contract where revealing the School of Truth's headquarters or his direct Overseer's name would cause his shadow to attack his soul.

"Damn, what if his Overseer sneaked in extra terms when the contract was signed? Could that be why Jebus had no clue answering would be risky? Heavens, how tragic is that? Nothing but lies and trickery through and through—are we dealing with Swindlers or Brokers here?"

After Franca's lament, Lumian considered for a few moments.

"Overseer."

"Overseer?" Franca caught on immediately. "Overseeing subordinates is an Overseer ability, but Jebus didn't know that. Did he set off some forbidden conditions by answering key questions?"

Jenna snapped to attention.

"You think the Overseer spotted us already? Could they be on their way?"

"Unlikely. I had Franca leave the Primordial Demoness figurine here after noticing Jebus's strange reaction," Lumian said, smiling. "Even if we're right, the Overseer probably just detected an issue with Jebus, not our precise location. The real problem is we may need to change our plans going forward."

Jenna and Anthony understood what Lumian meant.

They weren't under imminent threat or at risk of the Overseer tracking them down. But something had happened to Jebus, who was guarding Moran Avigny in the mirror world. Once the Overseer realized, they would easily deduce that someone was after Moran Avigny and undoubtedly take action. The scheme they had so carefully devised probably no longer fit the new circumstances.

Franca sighed heavily, eyeing the bone figurine on the ground with genuine regret.

"I resisted when the Demoness of Black first gave me this figurine. Now I'm wishing she'd given me a dozen!"

Poking fun at herself, she stooped down to retrieve the Primordial Demoness figurine. She delicately cleaned it off and murmured appreciatively.

Lumian took stock of his own actions.

"I should've been watching how Jebus's fate tributary shifted using the Eye of Calamity. Maybe then I could've intervened in time to stop him from responding."

He hadn't anticipated Jebus being oblivious to which questions would violate a taboo. This wasn't about religious devotion or advanced mystical knowledge. Jebus ought to have known what he could and couldn't say. If not, his daily life would've been cut short many times over.

Franca remembered, “The School of Truth member Jenna and I ran into before had the same thing happen when we asked his organizational affiliation and why he was capitalizing on the gatekeeper vanishing.

“Based on Jebus's answer, stating ‘the School of Truth’ itself isn't forbidden. And I bet the guy who wasn't even an Ambitionist yet had no idea why he was exploiting the gatekeeper's absence.

“Seems it really is an Overseer ability after all. No wonder the taboos are fluid, with the context, mental state, and overall situation determining what crosses the line each time. The rules adapt to the circumstances. Heh, just like the ideology Jebus described.”

Lumian gave a small nod and laughed.

“Well, at least we secured the spoils early on. Would've been a huge waste otherwise.”

He thought for a bit.

“Franca, contact the Demoness of Black with the charm later. Inform her about the fixed mirror world entrance we made, what occurred, and how Jebus reacted. See what she thinks and advises.

“Right, she's likely a Tamara from the Apprentice branch. No love lost between her and Moran Avigny, who defected from the Judgement branch.”

Franca concurred, and Lumian turned to Jenna next. “Head to the safehouse and send word to Madam Judgment. The Judgement pathway stands for order, so I feel we must alert her to the School of Truth situation at once. I'll take you there.”

“Got it.” Jenna was accustomed to Lumian delegating tasks in moments like these.

Finally, Lumian addressed Anthony.

“Join me at the Pleasure Pavilion to await Moran Avigny's arrival. Watch him closely for any unusual behavior.”

Situated on Avenue du Boulevard, the opulent Pavilion of Pleasure functioned as the Intis Republic's presidential estate. Moran Avigny was due to attend a ministerial meeting convened by the president there.

Anthony inclined his head slightly to convey his assent.

Observation was a Spectator's forte, after all.

Inside the quarry cave housing the mirror world's fixed entryway,

Franca leaned against the wall, her night vision active. She produced a compact and a charm fashioned from ashen stone.

Clasping the charm, Franca infused it with her spirituality. Reciting the Hermes activation phrase, she intoned,

“Eyes!”

Wreathed in obsidian flames, the rock-like grayish charm flared to life. Franca touched it to the compact's glass,

causing the mirror to lose solidity and turn incorporeal.

The burning charm sank through without resistance, vanishing from sight.

Moments later, Franca sensed a presence surround her.

A mass of dark locks then rose from the makeup mirror's surface.

The rippling black tresses obscured her view.

As the hair fully emerged, Franca tightened her grasp, and Clarice took form before her.

The Demoness of Black's own hair remained immaculately tied up, with no trace of the ominous raven strands.

Even having met her prior, Franca couldn't suppress a rush of awe at Clarice's allure.

The woman possessed a breathtaking beauty that effortlessly ensnared any who beheld her.

Clarice regarded Franca, her melodic voice gentle as she inquired, “You have an update?”

Composing herself, Franca detailed her suspicion of corruption seeping out of Underground Trier. She had ventured to a particular sector bearing the Primordial Demoness figurine, ultimately pinpointing the target site. She elaborated on beseeching the Primordial One via the figurine, obtaining a reply, and securing a permanent gateway to the mirror plane.

A rare glimmer of approval showed on Clarice's face. “Your instincts are sharp and your mind keen. Impressive that you conceived of and accomplished this. Perhaps you too shall rise to be a colored Demoness one day.”

Demoness of Yellow? Franca grumbled to herself.

She went on to outline the scheme she had hatched with Lumian's crew, withholding specifics about the Tarot Club and portraying the Mirror Mark power as an item.

Clarice listened attentively without comment.

Franca recounted the offensive against Lumian amid his probe, his triumph over Jibus, and the bounty of intel gleaned through a Spectator.

The Demoness of Black nodded. “Your lovers are quite capable, the Hunter in particular.”

Here Clarice smirked. “The taste of a Hunter isn't bad either. The higher their Sequence, the more intense and brave they grow.”

Wh— Emperor, even an elite Demoness has perused your clandestine annals... Every Demoness probably owns an edition! Franca wavered between finding Emperor Roselle's plight humorous or pitiable.

“It certainly has its perks,” Franca played along, smiling and trying to mask her chagrin.

The Demoness of Black proceeded, “However, both you and he erred.

“Upon amassing adequate knowledge, you should have ceased questioning without delay. The wiser course was to first ambush Moran Avigny, seize him, then interrogate further.”

“Agreed.” Franca accepted the Demoness of Black's reproach.

In hindsight, the location of the School of Truth's headquarters and the presiding Overseer's identity were not essential facts for their immediate needs. They could have morphed Jebus into a dog and set Lugano and Ludwig to guard him. While the Overseer remained unaware, she and the rest could have lurked within the mirror, poised for Moran Avigny to unwittingly enter of his own accord. Ample chances to take a second captive would have presented themselves down the line.

However, this was Lumian's style.

It had long been apparent to Franca that Lumian was predisposed to extracting intelligence on the spot. Only extraordinary reasons would induce him to postpone. As if he feared the slightest delay might thwart him from procuring otherwise obtainable insight.

Demoness of Black Clarice refrained from belaboring the point. Nodding, she declared, “Abide here for my return. I'll look into these developments, but it may require some time.”

“As you wish, Madame Clarice.” Franca made no effort to conceal her gratified smile.

Outside the dazzling Pavilion of Pleasure on Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian and Anthony seamlessly rejoined the throng of journalists.

Chapter 718 Another Warning

Lumian and Anthony only had to wait briefly before the ministers began exiting the Pavilion of Pleasure one by one.

They quickly approached Moran Avigny, the Minister of Industry. While listening to the other reporters' questions, they employed their unique abilities to observe him closely.

After just over ten seconds, Lumian turned to Anthony and gave a small shake of his head, indicating that, for now, there was nothing unusual about Moran's river of fate.

He trusted that Anthony, being a Spectator, would understand his unspoken message.

Anthony responded with a slight head shake of his own, confirming to Lumian that Moran Avigny's expression and behavior appeared normal.

Has the Overseer directly responsible for Jebus not reached out to Moran Avigny? Or could our assumption be incorrect? Is it possible that Jebus's death wasn't detected by the Overseer's

monitoring? Have they not fully grasped the situation with Jebus? These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he continued his observation.

This was precisely why he had come in person to the Pavilion of Pleasure to await Moran Avigny's appearance.

Only by acquiring the most current and reliable information could he assess whether to move forward with the original plan, adjust it, or temporarily set it aside!

Indeed, within Moran Avigny's river of fate, a tributary of him entering the full-body mirror in the study still exists, shrouded in an intense black hue... Lumian, unconcerned about the drain on his spirituality, maintained his focus on any potential shifts in Moran Avigny's destiny.

Following a short interview, the debonair Minister of Industry, flanked by his bodyguards, descended the steps of the Pavilion of Pleasure and headed towards his stylish four-wheeled, four-seater carriage.

As the valet opened the carriage door, Moran Avigny pulled out a small hand mirror from his pocket, seemingly checking his appearance.

In Trier's high society, this was a typical occurrence. Men's cosmetics and grooming had long been in vogue.

Moran Avigny peered into the hand mirror, his dark-gray pupils abruptly widening as his expression subtly changed.

Nearly simultaneously, Lumian, with his silver-black eyes, detected a notable alteration in the Minister of Industry's fate tributary.

None of the tributaries suggested Moran Avigny's entry into the study's full-body mirror!

All relevant "choices" had vanished!

As a result, even if Lumian depleted nearly half of his spirituality and employed Compelling Fate, he would be unable to force Moran Avigny to "willingly" enter the study's full-body mirror.

Compelling Fate wasn't about creating destiny; choices had to exist before they could be compelled!

Taking advantage of the moment when the reporters had shifted their focus and the two of them were slowly trailing behind, Anthony quietly said to Lumian, "When Moran Avigny looked at himself in the hand mirror, he experienced a palpable sense of fear."

As Lumian followed the other reporters, he continued to assess Moran Avigny and formed a related hypothesis.

Someone was utilizing the mirror world and the hand mirror to convey a message to Moran Avigny!

The transmitted information likely pertained to the mysterious demise of Jebus Lata, who was tasked with guarding the study's full-body mirror, and the disappearance of his body.

For Moran Avigny, this implied that someone was conspiring against him. The shadow was already looming over him, its source and circumstances unknown.

Under such conditions, fear was inevitable. For the majority of people, emotions would inevitably manifest to some degree in their facial expressions and physical movements, making them readily apparent to Spectators.

Yes, given that Jebus possessed a Mirror Cufflink, it's reasonable to assume that the Overseer above him would have comparable items. They might even possess the additional capability to communicate via the mirror world... Lumian recalled, thinking of the glass cufflink now in Franca's possession. Moreover, Jebus had disclosed that Moran Avigny had instructed the other Mirror People from the Tamara family to assume new identities and relocate, leaving him as the sole contact with the School of Truth.

Consequently, when the Overseer discovered Jebus's unexplained disappearance and ultimate death, they would be unable to reach the other Mirror People. They could only await the conclusion of Moran Avigny's ministerial meeting to send him a warning.

Our prior conjectures have been validated. The Overseer did indeed detect Jebus's death. Whether the Overseer was limited by his abilities or hindered by the Primordial Démoness figurine is uncertain, but he was unable to immediately locate us and launch a counterattack...

We must abandon the original plan. Getting Moran Avigny to 'willingly' enter the study's full-body mirror is no longer feasible...

Lost in thought, Lumian watched as Moran Avigny tucked away the hand mirror, boarded the carriage, and headed home.

Taking advantage of the still somewhat chaotic scene, he and Anthony discreetly left the Pavilion of Pleasure.

At the periphery of a square adorned with statues and obelisks, Lumian scanned his surroundings. Confirming that no one was nearby, he murmured to Anthony, "What do you think frightened Moran Avigny?"

He had already shared his theory with Anthony.

Drawing on his Spectator perspective, Anthony endeavored to analyze the psychological states of the School of Truth and Moran Avigny.

"Without intel on the enemy, it's improbable that the School of Truth, a secret organization worshipping an evil deity, would dispatch additional demigod-level operatives to Moran Avigny's proximity to enhance protection for the Mirror People. Unlike an orthodox Church, they can't afford to act rashly and perpetually escalate their involvement. They must consider the possibility that the group that apprehended Jebus is equally formidable, potentially including a demigod in their ranks. They might even suspect that this could be a covert mission orchestrated by the Purifier, Machinery Hivemind, or an elite unit from Bureau 8.

"In essence, the Overseer will convey to Moran Avigny that he's now on his own. They'll offer indirect support but can't intervene directly.

"Other cults might react with insanity, extremism, and irrationality while still defending Moran Avigny. However, based on Jebus's ideology, the School of Truth will refrain from such actions."

“That explains why Moran Avigny couldn't conceal his fear. It's tantamount to being forsaken.” Lumian gently nodded.

Anthony continued his analysis.

“We must also take into account Moran Avigny's unique characteristic as a Mirror Person.

“The Mirror People we've previously encountered not only pursued their own ambitions but also exhibited a certain zealotry towards their leader and overarching objectives.

“Based on my observations, while Moran Avigny is undeniably terrified, he managed to exercise some restraint. Upon entering the carriage, he appeared resolute and determined.”

Lumian comprehended and remarked, “Is he contemplating self-sacrifice? He'll promptly alert the other Mirror People and urge them to swiftly conceal themselves. As for himself, he's under the strict protection of officials, rendering escape impossible. His only option is to remain in place, visible to the enemy faction, hoping that his fortune is sufficient and the official protection proves effective.

“Heh heh, in times like these, protection becomes another form of confinement.”

Anthony shifted the topic. “Which tributary turned black following the change in Moran Avigny's fate?”

Lumian shook his head. “Nothing at present. This is an exceptionally unique situation. It signifies that it will manifest only when Moran Avigny makes a new choice, branching into a new fate tributary.”

At this juncture, Lumian exhaled slowly and stated, “I don't perceive any other opportunities at the moment. It would have been good if the Overseer had acted rashly and protected Moran Avigny. The Demoness of Black should be awaiting him. Hmm, let's locate Jenna and Franca first.”

In the quarry cave housing a permanent entrance to the mirror world, Franca, who had been patiently waiting, witnessed black hair reemerge from the mirror, descending strand by strand.

Demoness of Black Clarice materialized and spoke softly, “Currently, no Beyonders are concealed behind the relevant mirror. They must have abandoned Moran Avigny.

“I'm unable to provide assistance at this time. You must reevaluate your strategy and devise a means to capture Moran Avigny, who is under the robust protection of official Beyonders, without entering the mirror world.”

Do you have a solution in mind? Franca wished to inquire but refrained out of concern for offending the Demoness of Black. Instead, she simply replied, “Understood.”

In a secure safe house within the administrative district, Jenna informed Lumian and Anthony, “Madame Judgment has instructed us to halt further action for now. She needs to confer with the other Major Arcana card holders regarding the information obtained from Jebus.”

With Ma'am Hermit? Lumian pondered silently, immersed in thought.

He gave a small nod and said, "Let's go find Franca."

After rendezvousing with Franca in the subterranean quarry cave and sharing their discoveries, Lumian sighed and declared, "For the time being, we have no choice but to abandon our efforts."

As Franca and the others nodded in agreement, Lumian suddenly heard a resounding voice.

"Don't you believe you're capitulating prematurely?"

"Did you fail to notice any issues?"

Termiboros... Why is He offering me guidance? And it's not an urgent matter that threatens Him? Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.

Termiboros's profound voice persisted, "Consider this. If you were an Overseer, what actions would you take in such a scenario?"

"Naturally, they would reduce personnel and conceal themselves to prevent the enemy from discovering clues and pursuing them..." Lumian muttered under his breath. "Beyond this, what else can they do? How can they indirectly aid Moran Avigny?"

Franca, Jenna, and Anthony observed Lumian as he mumbled to himself, awaiting his ultimate explanation.

Abruptly, a possibility occurred to Lumian.

He gazed at his three companions and said in a low, serious tone, "Under the Table Transaction!"

"Safeguard Moran Avigny through a high-level Under the Table transaction!"

"That's why we each abandoned the plan for distinct reasons. Even the river of fate currently shows no death calamity for Moran Avigny!"

Chapter 719 Advancing

"We were under the influence of an Under the Table transaction?" Franca carefully reviewed the entire situation but couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. The only thing that stood out was that the Demoneess of Black probably had a way to quickly extract Moran Avigny while he was under the protection of an official Beyonder team. She clearly knew how to exploit the mirror world, yet she burdened everything upon her.

Of course, her actions made sense when put into context. Even though Moran Avigny's security detail consisted of Mid-Sequence Beyonders, this was Trier, the capital of the Intis Republic. It was a diocese of great importance to both the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the God of Steam and Machinery Church. Numerous demigods were posted there, ready to intervene at a moment's notice.

If the Demoness of Black couldn't end the fight quickly and eliminate all witnesses, she would face severe repercussions. Official Beyonders might even track her using specialized Sealed Artifacts.

If something happened to her, the Demoness Sect's Trier branch would be dealt a crippling blow. In a situation like this, it would be wiser for her to assign a capable member of middling rank to handle the matter while she focused on damage control. If things went south, she could easily cut ties with Franca and her lovers.

This assumed, of course, that Moran Avigny wasn't valuable enough for the Demoness Sect to go to great lengths to eliminate him. If he were, the sect would have evacuated non-essential personnel beforehand and assembled high-ranking, color-named Demonesses in Trier.

"I think there's an issue here. It's not that we shouldn't or can't abandon the mission, but rather that we gave up far too readily and hastily," Anthony remarked, analyzing the situation from a human behavioral standpoint.

Franca nodded pensively and added, "Indeed. The Demoness of Black only briefly verified the absence of hidden Beyonders behind the mirror in question before concluding that Moran Avigny had been abandoned and would receive no further assistance."

"That's way too rushed and convenient," Jenna commented.

After a moment's hesitation, she asked, "Was Madam Judgment affected as well?"

"It's possible." Lumian glanced down at his chest.

Lowering his voice, he asked, "Termiboros, why weren't you impacted? Is it because you're an Angel?"

Termiboros's imposing voice echoed within Lumian's body.

"It's hard to say for certain. It could also be due to The Fool's seal. While the seal does limit me, it can also serve as a safeguard under certain circumstances."

Similar to Naboredisley's Abomination corpse? The Overseer's Under the Table transaction couldn't breach Mr. Fool's seal, so it had no effect on Termiboros? Lumian nodded in understanding and said to Jenna, "We need to inform Madam Judgment of our suspicions. If an Under the Table transaction is indeed at play, she'll undoubtedly break free of its influence and offer new guidance once alerted. If she's unaffected, the messenger will just have to put in a bit of extra effort."

"Got it." Jenna grasped Lumian's point. "Even though we suspect an Under the Table transaction, we can't act recklessly right now. We still require fresh directives from the Major Arcana cardholders."

As Franca waited for Madam Judgment's reply, she let out a sigh.

"Is something wrong?" Jenna inquired, her worry apparent.

Franca responded with a mix of sorrow and outrage, "This Under the Table transaction was exceptionally lavish. It impacted no fewer than two demigods. The Overseer of the School of Truth must have paid a steep price and offered up a considerable number of precious items."

Sure, that's all true, but what's it got to do with you? Why are you so worked up about it? Jenna blinked, struggling to grasp Franca's train of thought.

Franca elaborated, "Once Madam Judgment apprehends or eliminates him with our assistance, there won't be much left in terms of spoils of war for us to divvy up.

"We might end up with another penniless target like Jebus!"

Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony were momentarily at a loss for words.

You're already worrying about hypothetical future spoils?

Lumian shifted the topic and turned to Franca and Jenna.

"When I posed those final two questions to Jebus, why did you two lean in closer to me? Did you sense that something was about to go awry?"

"Naturally, it was a Demoness's intuitive premonition," Franca declared smugly.

"While I couldn't pinpoint what exactly would happen, being nearer to you provided me with more options for dealing with potential threats."

Jenna gave a subtle nod, indicating that she felt the same way.

Lumian faced Anthony. "What about you?"

Anthony answered honestly, "I suspected that the last two questions would snap Jebus out of his hypnotic state. Franca and Jenna's reactions indirectly validated my concerns.

"Given that, it seemed prudent to take cover behind you two."

"So you're using us as human shields?" Franca remarked with a wry smile.

Anthony nodded earnestly. "You two have Mirror Substitution at your disposal."

"Fair point," Franca conceded.

After a short while, Madam Judgment's messenger delivered a response. The message was succinct: "Proceed with your course of action."

Does this imply that the Major Arcana cardholders will monitor the situation? Have they consulted with Ma'am Hermit? Lumian nodded thoughtfully and grinned at Franca and the others.

"Let's stick to our initial plan."

"The initial plan?" Franca started, taken aback.

"Precisely," Lumian confirmed, still smiling. "Over the next several hours, potentially even a full day, the Overseer and the other Mirror People certainly won't be guarding Moran Avigny from behind the full-length mirror in his study. That should be a necessary condition for the Under the Table transaction to succeed. The Demoness of Black has already inspected those locations, and the Overseer is unaware of when she might do so again. He needs to allow sufficient time.

“Put another way, if we conceal ourselves within that mirror, we'll be safe from disruption and harm.”

Jenna's brow furrowed slightly.

“But doesn't the heart of the issue lie in the fact that Moran Avigny won't be entering the full-length mirror anytime soon? How can we ambush him...”

Jenna abruptly trailed off, as if a thought had just occurred to her.

Lumian's grin widened. “The Overseer may resort to an Under the Table transaction, but so can we!”

“Indeed, the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction!” Franca immediately grasped Lumian's implication.

Lumian planned to harness the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction to plant the idea in Moran Avigny's mind to re-enter the full-length mirror!

As for how an Under the Table transaction would enable such an arrangement to work, that wasn't their concern. Even the Overseer probably didn't know the inner workings of the Under the Table transaction.

Under the Table dealings were, in a sense, a black box!

With Magic Mirror Divination verifying the level of risk, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony ventured into the enigmatic and shadowy realm via the mirror world entrance affixed to the jutting rock.

Surveying the spiderweb-like void passageways stretching to unknown destinations, Lumian activated the Mirror Mark contract imprinted on him.

He then addressed Franca and the others, “I can detect the full-length mirror and determine its precise whereabouts.”

“In that case, let's make our way there immediately.” Franca pulled up her Assassin suit's hood once more and latched onto Lumian's arm.

She had already donned the Mirror Cufflink, but why squander one of its uses when other means were available?

As soon as Jenna and Anthony grabbed hold of him again, Lumian triggered the Spirit World Traversal mark and teleported through one of the dark, vacant passageways to a deep, black aqueous light.

The aqueous light signified a mirror with a corresponding hazy zone linked to myriad illusory tunnels akin to spiderwebs.

Lumian peered into the dark aqueous light and observed the scene through the glass mirror. It was undoubtedly Moran Avigny's study.

Franca likewise recognized the target's position and breathed a sigh of relief.

“I'll handle the Under the Table transaction.”

“Allow me.” Lumian smiled. “Given what transpired earlier, I might encounter Demons even without the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction. In that case, I might as well use it freely.”

He was alluding to the events surrounding Naboredisley.

“Very well.” Franca yielded to Lumian's reasoning. “Then I'll cover the cost!”

She produced 5,000 verl d'or worth of gold from her Traveler's Bag.

Lumian accepted without protest and said to Jenna and the others, “The transaction I aim to complete is to instill in Moran Avigny the notion of entering the full-length mirror in his study. Then, I'll employ Compelling Fate to transform that notion into reality.

“This is far simpler than directly compelling Moran Avigny to enter the mirror. The price will undoubtedly be lower.”

“Understood.” Jenna retrieved the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction from her backpack.

The small, dark wooden box still had eight uses remaining.

Lumian grasped Franca's pouch of gold coins in his right hand and reached through the membrane-like “curtain.”

He then felt five damp, wrinkled fingers. They swiftly closed around the pouch containing the gold coins.

Lumian's expression remained neutral as he articulated his request in Hermes.

After a brief pause, the wrinkled, moist palm returned the pouch of gold coins.

Wh— Lumian glanced up and apprised Franca and the others of the development.

Franca promptly understood. “It's demanding more money!”

Her heart sank as she produced additional banknotes and gold, but the slightly cold, wrinkled palm kept rejecting the payment.

Lumian contributed tens of thousands of verl d'or, yet the transaction still wouldn't go through.

“Could it be that Under the Table doesn't desire money or gold?” Jenna recalled Jebus's insights regarding the Broker pathway.

“Perhaps it requires a mystical item?” Lumian pondered, considering what he could offer.

Franca deliberated for a moment before suggesting, “What about the Blood Gold ring? It has considerable drawbacks, and we've hardly used it.”

The Blood Gold ring had come from Mad Lady and corresponded to some of the capabilities of a Sequence 6 Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway.

The four of them conferred for a while before deciding to attempt the transaction with the Blood Gold ring.

The moment the Blood Gold ring touched Under the Table, the five fingers of the palm clenched firmly and withdrew, taking the ring with them.

This indicated that the deal had been finalized.

Phew... Lumian exhaled in relief and remarked, "I'm curious to see how the Under the Table transaction will unfold..."

Franca pressed a hand to her chest and prayed to Mr. Fool, "Please don't let us run into any swindlers. Praise The Fool!"

Chapter 720 Unexpected "Helper"

The word "swindler" hung in the air, leaving Lumian and the others in stunned silence as similar thoughts raced through their minds.

Surely they couldn't be that unlucky, right?

Jebus had warned them about the possibility of running into swindlers during an Under the Table deal, but Franca's previous experiences with Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction had always been reliable. Plus, the Blood Gold ring had been accepted this time around.

If Lumian hadn't been personally overseeing the transaction, he would've used the Eye of Calamity to assess the likelihood of it being finalized and look for ways to interfere.

But for now, the four of them had no choice but to wait patiently. Hidden behind the dark, watery light, they watched the scene unfolding in the study through the glass mirror.

As the night wore on, Lumian and his companions nibbled on the rations he'd packed for Ludwig in his Traveler's Bag to keep their hunger at bay.

Close to 10 p.m., Moran Avigny strode into the study, leaving the wooden door wide open. He sank into an armchair beneath the gas wall lamp, grabbed a book from a nearby pile, and began casually flipping through it.

The Purifier team tasked with his protection remained stationed at the door as usual, never setting foot inside.

Moran Avigny had always insisted on this arrangement. He'd even signed contracts with the Purifiers, Machinery Hivemind members, and Bureau 8 team, acknowledging that he was willing to take on the associated risks.

The security detail understood. A politician's study likely concealed all sorts of shady secrets. Keeping people with Beyonder powers from entering was a way for Moran Avigny to protect himself.

As was his custom, Moran Avigny left the study door open instead of shutting it, making it simpler for the Purifiers to keep an eye out for any potential trouble.

While perusing the books, Moran Avigny would occasionally glance up at the full-length mirror positioned just out of the Purifiers' line of sight, his thoughts seemingly far away.

At the same time, Lumian's eyes, hidden within the mirror, glinted a silvery-black.

Peering through the glass, he studied Moran Avigny's river of fate.

Looking closer, he confirmed that the Minister of Industry had indeed gained several new fate tributaries involving stepping into the full-length mirror. One of them was even cloaked in a thick, black hue.

Seizing the moment when Moran Avigny ducked his head to resume reading, Lumian slowly reached his right palm out from the mirror, pressing it firmly against the glass as if it were merely a reflection.

Then, he unleashed his remaining spirituality, transforming it into a raging, phantom river that surged toward the mercury stream symbolizing Moran Avigny's fate from a few meters away.

The main trunk of Moran Avigny's fate swallowed up the other tributaries and rushed into the dense, black one.

Compelling Fate!

Channeling the spirituality he'd accumulated using his Ascetic abilities, Lumian quickly withdrew his palm to avoid tipping off Moran Avigny.

He gave Franca and the others a nod, signaling that both the Under the Table deal and his Compelling of Fate had been successful.

As for the exact way Moran Avigny would embark on this fated path, Lumian couldn't say. The details were beyond his sight.

Franca and Jenna let out sighs of relief.

Not daring to speak lest they alert Moran Avigny, who possessed mirror-related abilities, they shared their understanding with Lumian through gratified smiles and relaxed nods.

They retreated to their positions, preparing for the upcoming ambush.

Just as fate was being compelled, Moran Avigny's spirituality abruptly sensed a warning, filling him with a feeling of impending danger.

The mirror message he'd received at dusk sprang to mind, and he started to suspect that the unknown enemy the Overseer had mentioned was plotting something that could put his life at risk.

Unable to resist, Moran Avigny glanced at the full-length mirror once more, debating whether to flee into it and abandon this place before the Purifiers had a chance to react. He yearned to shed his current identity and vanish completely from the hidden enemy's radar.

Fighting back his impulses, he turned his head to look at the Purifiers standing guard at the door.

There could be a trap lurking behind the mirror. His best bet was to pray that the official Beyonders would be able to shield him!

This is Trier, and I'm a minister of the country!

Right then, his valet appeared at the door, carrying a glass of warm milk.

Drinking warm milk before showering and brushing his teeth was part of Moran Avigny's nightly routine to help him sleep.

The Purifiers carried out their standard checks before permitting the valet to enter the study.

“Your milk, Sir,” the valet said deferentially, extending a white porcelain cup brimming with the liquid.

Moran Avigny had made immense contributions to Intis's industrial growth and had been awarded the Legion of Honor medal, earning him the rank of Knight.

Nodding his head slightly, Moran Avigny reached out his right hand to accept the glass.

All of a sudden, he noticed his valet's eyes cloud over, an indescribable agony lurking in their depths.

A heartbeat later, the valet's mouth flew open and he vomited.

What he spat out was a solid, writhing chunk of blood-colored flesh, hurled directly at Moran Avigny!

The flesh swiftly ballooned, morphing into a cloak of flesh and blood that wrapped around Moran Avigny. It wriggled inward, seemingly trying to force its way into the Minister of Industry's body.

In the mirror, Lumian was stunned.

This aura...

It's Mr. K!

Why had he shown up out of nowhere to try to assassinate Moran Avigny?

With a sharp crack, Moran Avigny, cocooned in the flesh-and-blood cloak, transformed into a mirror and shattered.

Nearly simultaneously, the Purifiers at the door sprang into action. A column of pure light wreathed in flames plummeted from the sky, bathing the cloak and causing it to visibly start melting.

Witnessing this, Moran Avigny spun around without hesitation and lunged at the mirror nearest to him.

He had already revealed Mirror Substitution to the Purifiers. Short of eliminating every witness without a trace, he would undoubtedly face intense scrutiny later on and lose the protection of the contract.

His only option was to take advantage of this chance to escape through the mirror world while the Purifiers tangled with the assassin!

As he watched Moran Avigny's figure loom larger and nearer to the full-length mirror, a thought abruptly struck Lumian.

Could this be fate?

He instantly retreated and disappeared.

A moment later, Moran Avigny's figure passed through the mirror, emerging behind the hazy, shadowy, and nearly vacant looking glass.

The Purifiers outside were shocked to see this. At the same time, they grasped that something was seriously wrong with the target under their protection.

Their attention wavered briefly. Taking advantage of the distraction, Mr. K changed Grazing targets and teleported away from Moran Avigny's residence.

In the space behind the mirror, Moran Avigny didn't linger. He promptly activated Mirror Traversal, rapidly changing positions to throw off any would-be pursuers.

Just then, he felt his body grow inexplicably heavier, his movements oddly constricted, stopping him from successfully slipping into an empty, dark tunnel.

It was as though someone had seized him.

Right after that, Moran Avigny sensed invisible threads coiling around his limbs and torso, layer upon layer.

With his Sheriff powers, he pinpointed the source of the sinister threads. They were close by.

Moran Avigny angled his head marginally and peered at an empty corner. His eyes flashed with two blinding "lightning bolts."

Psychic Piercing!

The "lightning" lanced out, hitting the empty spot. A sharp cracking rang out, scattering shards of shattered mirrors.

At the same instant, Jenna, dressed in a black gown and veiled bonnet, materialized behind Moran Avigny, gripping a small, elegant revolver.

Bang!

She squeezed the trigger, targeting Moran Avigny's vest.

The yellow bullet, wreathed in silent black flames, struck the target's body with precision at close range.

Crack! Moran Avigny deployed Mirror Substitution yet again.

As broken mirrors rained down, his figure rematerialized in a different corner of the hazy space. Franca and Jenna vanished without a trace.

Feeling the intangible threads enveloping him, Moran Avigny thrust out his right palm and intoned in ancient Hermes, "Invisibility is prohibited here!"

The instant he uttered the final word, innumerable transparent spider silks undulated throughout the area, resembling seaweed blanketing a section of ocean. Franca, garbed as an Assassin, and Jenna, clad in dark attire, circled or advanced, respectively, poised to strike again.

Realizing that the two foes couldn't touch him for the moment and that the invisible spider silk hadn't constricted, Moran Avigny had no time for a counterattack. He immediately sought to use Mirror Traversal to flee the area.

Out of nowhere, Moran Avigny's eyes bulged, his expression contorting with viciousness.

His body shattered once more, assuming the shape of a mirror.

Not far off, Anthony Reid, dressed like a veteran, “appeared.”

He had just cast Frenzy on Moran Avigny!

The Prohibition of Invisibility rule didn't constrain him since he wasn't invisible. However, Moran Avigny himself hadn't been looking in Anthony's direction!

After employing Mirror Substitution multiple times, Moran Avigny rematerialized on the far side of the space, putting distance between himself and Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

Grasping that yet another enemy had entered the fray, he fled with intensified urgency.

Right as Moran Avigny was poised to activate Mirror Traversal, Franca lowered her hood, unveiling her radiant, refined features.

As she did, the diamond necklace adorning her neck emitted a subtle glow.

Beatrice's Necklace!

Moran Avigny's body flushed with heat, his gaze magnetized to Franca's lake-blue eyes, her high, delicate nose bridge, her fair, flawless skin, and her lush, crimson lips. For an instant, his desire to escape slipped his mind.

The activation of Beatrice's Necklace didn't pose a direct threat to Moran Avigny's life, so it failed to trigger Mirror Substitution. Moran Avigny lacked the time to deploy it himself. His cravings had already swelled beyond his control!