

Inevitability 761

Chapter 761 The Blessings Festival

Beside a segment of the old city wall, now merely a relic for admiration, Lumian's gaze passed between the tall and short gray-white stone buildings and landed on a majestic temple standing near the mountain range.

It towered thirty meters high, made up of several turrets, reminiscent of an ancient war fortress left over from bygone eras.

At this moment, influenced by both the mountains and the clouds, the near-noon sunlight cast a dim hue, cloaking the grand temple in a dusk-like veil.

“Is that a temple of the God of Combat?” Lumian didn't turn his head as he asked the Knight of Swords beside him.

The God of Combat Church was the only state religion of the Feysac Empire, but following their defeat in the war a few years ago, the Evernight Goddess Church had gained a certain right to preach within the empire, although they seemed unenthusiastic about this role.

The Knight of Swords replied succinctly, “It's a cathedral.”

Not a temple, but a cathedral? True to the Feysacians, who suffer from a fascination with enormity, and their taste is not bad... For some reason, Lumian suddenly recalled a phrase he had heard at the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society: More is beautiful, bigger is better.

He then asked, “Is this a Feysac colony?”

“Yes,” the Knight of Swords replied in a deep voice, “but now, the Loenese have the right to trade here.”

Lumian nodded slightly, saying nothing further as he followed the road into Raklev City.

Along the way, it was easy for him to distinguish people from different countries among the crowd:

The Feysacians, tall in stature—men typically over six feet three inches, women nearly six feet—matched Lumian's stereotype of them: descendants of giants, even including many half-giants. Their dressing tended to be casual, with either unbuttoned jackets or no jackets at all;

The Loenese, predominantly with black hair, cared much about their appearance, always impeccably dressed. The ladies favored round-brimmed bonnets and carried sun-blocking parasols, while the gentlemen were decked out in top hats and carried canes;

The locals of Raklev were darker-skinned and wiry. The men often wore durable canvas work clothes, and the women dressed for labor, with only a few in brightly colored dresses, herding cattle, sheep, and horses.

Lumian watched a dwarf horse and several long-haired cattle pass by, spotting a local man in a dark red robe with a stark white skull topped with a wool-knit gray and white hat on his head.

“Is this the remnant of Death worship you mentioned in the local customs?” Lumian didn't choose his path deliberately but followed his instincts.

The Knight of Swords nodded slightly and said, “Yes, the people of Raklev keep the skulls of their deceased relatives at home, believing they protect them, bring good luck, and help fend off dangers lurking in the night. The more skulls a family has, the more prosperous and developed it is considered.”

This is similar to the practice in Cordu where relatives' hair and nails are kept... but here, the Death worship is much stronger, hence the choice of skulls, making it more extreme...

Lumian suddenly felt a pang of melancholy.

The Knight of Swords continued, “Some even make amulets from the skulls of their deceased kin to carry with them at all times. What you saw earlier was just such a case.

During the annual Blessing Festival, all the locals in Raklev take the skulls from their homes into the streets, dress them solemnly, and join in the revelry and prayers together.”

“Blessing Festival?” Lumian perked up, asking with gravity.

Having experienced Lent, Sea Prayer Festival, and Dream Festival, he felt like he had developed a sort of festival-induced PTSD, with a headache starting whenever he heard of another special day.

Oxyto, a Shaman King of the Rose School of Thought and a key follower of the Primordial Moon, couldn't be staying in Raklev just for the Blessing Festival, could he?

The Knight of Swords responded somberly, “The Blessing Festival has long since passed; it was in November last year, more than a month before the Dream Festival.”

You know about the Dream Festival... Lumian first breathed a sigh of relief, then asked anxiously, “Did Oxyto first appear in the Raklev area before or after the Blessing Festival?”

The Knight of Swords thought for a moment before replying, “Before.”

“So during the Blessing Festival, he was likely still in the Raklev area?” Lumian furrowed his brow slightly.

“That seems to be the case,” the Knight of Swords answered, very cautiously.

...

Franca's gaze drifted away from a local woman with colorful skulls sewn onto her shoulder, and she turned to a tall, blond, blue-eyed woman from Feysac with a smile. “Sorry, I already have a lady companion!”

Isn't this Feysacian a bit too forthright?

Flirting with me and Jenna, and to think, aside from men, there were also beautiful women inviting us over!

The Feysacian chuckled. “I don't mind if you both come over to my place.”

“I mind,” Jenna spoke up for Franca.

They had been wandering around Raklev City for nearly two hours. Although Franca hadn't actively unleashed the Demoness of Pleasure's charm-to avoid suspicion of fishing purposefully-their

carefully styled Demoness appearance alone, in terms of looks, demeanor, and figure, was enough to draw plenty of attention.

Here, the Feysacians were bold and direct, both men and women, while the Loenese were conservative and reserved, only daring to approach after finding a good reason. The locals mostly just watched from a distance, quietly following, with a few gathering the courage to speak up, but only in the guise of offering guidance.

“Alright then.” The female Feysacian, a bit taller than Franca, waved her hand in disappointment and turned to enter a nearby café.

Franca and Jenna were now in the heart of Raklev City, on a street that boasted the grand and elegant architectural style typical of Feysac.

“It's almost noon, how about trying some Feysac cuisine?” Franca looked up at the sun, bright but not warm.

She was referring to the St. Millom Restaurant diagonally across from them.

St. Millom was the capital of the Feysac Empire, and naming a restaurant after it seemed an attempt to offer an “authentic” experience.

“Sure.” Jenna nodded gently.

As the two Demonesses stepped into the grand and intricately decorated restaurant, Anthony sat down on a bench across the street and quietly started on his lunch—a corn tortilla wrapped around beef and lamb, seasoned with various spices.

...

Lumian walked with Ludwig and Lugano until they reached the temple-like Holy Lake Cathedral.

But once they truly entered the city, the Knight of Swords, Maric, disappeared. However, Lumian's instincts told him that this Minor Arcana card holder was still nearby.

“Feeling anything unusual?” Lumian inquired of Ludwig.

“No,” Ludwig shook his head.

Lumian then turned to Lugano. “What about you?”

“Me?” Lugano looked baffled.

Isn't it Ludwig's job to locate people?

What does this have to do with me?

“Do you sense anything unusual?” Lumian calmly repeated the question.

For some reason, Lugano felt that his employer had become more approachable lately, so he honestly replied, “No.”

Gurgle, gurgle, a strange noise sounded next to both him and Lumian.

Both turned their gaze to Ludwig.

Touching his stomach, Ludwig looked eager and said, "It's time for lunch."

"Alright," Lumian agreed readily.

His philosophy was to never let a child go hungry, especially since the starving child might resort to cannibalism.

He looked around and pointed towards a bustling street to the northwest of Holy Lake Square.

"There seem to be quite a few restaurants there."

This time, Ludwig didn't need Lugano's hand-holding; he scampered ahead with short strides, while Lumian followed at a leisurely pace, and Lugano trailed close behind.

The street bore a very typical Feysac characteristic, complete with trees and benches, resembling a streetscape in the Northern Continent countries.

Lumian glanced around briefly and pointed with his chin to St. Millom Restaurant not far away.

"Let's try some Feysac cuisine."

"Okay." Ludwig wiped his mouth.

Suddenly, his eager expression turned to confusion, and his head moved left and right as if searching for something.

Lumian noticed this unusual behavior.

"Why? Want an ice cream too?" he teased Ludwig.

Imitating Lugano's usual demeanor, Ludwig pressed his voice down and said, "I think I sensed that child from the body, but it's vague."

Sensed the bird-clawed baby? Lumian looked around; there were no other children in sight, just Feysacians and locals, with a few from Loen scattered among them.

There weren't even any pregnant women around.

Then, Ludwig added, "I can't sense it anymore."

Had it moved beyond a thirty-meter range? Lumian thoughtfully withdrew his gaze.

If what we had just encountered was related to the bird-clawed baby, then my own Omebella bloodline might have been sensed by the other...

Lumian nodded and smiled at Ludwig. "Let's eat first, nothing's more important than filling our bellies."

"Right!" For the first time, Ludwig felt that the godfather's words resonated deeply with him.

Upon entering St. Millom Restaurant, Lumian immediately noticed Franca and Jenna sitting in a conspicuous spot.

The carefully dressed Demonesses caught Lumian's attention for an extra second.

Meanwhile, he wondered to himself, Is this the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Convergence?

How coincidental for us to choose the same restaurant...

(Reader note: A reasonable development)

Franca and Jenna, noticing his gaze, looked back at him—one with a mouth agape in surprise, the other stifling a laugh.

They quickly composed themselves and turned their attention back to the beet soup in front of them.

With the waiter's guidance, Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano took a seat in the corner.

“Sir, what would you like to order?” The waiter offered a menu designed like a book.

Lumian glanced at it, chose not to browse through, and simply said, “One set of everything but the drinks.”

Chapter 762 The Flirting Showcase

Although limited by the variety of local ingredients, St. Millom Restaurant's menu appeared thick, yet it didn't offer an extensive variety of dishes. However, relatively speaking, a whole book's worth of menu items couldn't possibly be too few—it was enough to make a dozen adults feel stuffed.

The restaurant's waiter was a local, but he spoke fluent Feysacian, Loenese, and Intisian, completely understanding Lumian's order without any confusion.

He was about to double-check when he saw the customer from Intis bring out a thick stack of gold hoorn.

This was the currency of the Feysac Empire, commonly used in the Raklev arebefore teleporting to the Southern Continent that morning, Lumian had specifically gone to a nearby bank to exchange some cash at a higher rate of 4.4 verl d'or for one gold hoorn, but the cash he now produced wasn't his own; it was activity funds provided by the Knight of Swords, Maric.

“All of it?” The waiter, diligent and thorough, made one last inquiry.

“All of it,” Lumian confirmed, earning Ludwig's approval.

After a while, dishes like beet soup, red wine beef stew, cream-fried cod, caviar, grilled meat skewers, appetizer salad, thick-cut steaks, and Feysac pies were served one by one.

Ludwig was utterly immersed in a sea of flavors, and Lumian, too, let himself indulge.

As a Sequence 5 Reaper, his appetite was already not small, and similarly, Harvest Priest Lugano, starting as a Planter, was eating more and more.

After nearly filling their stomachs, as Lumian savored the salty, fishy burst of the caviar in his mouth and awaited the arrival of dessert, he pondered over the recent events.

Why did Ludwig just vaguely sense the presence of the bird-clawed baby, and then in the blink of an eye, it vanished?

Could it be that we were exactly thirty meters apart, and just one step further would break the range of perception?

This is too coincidental... If it were arranged, they would have let Ludwig keep sensing it...

If Ludwig could sense the bird-clawed baby, could the baby also sense its 'mother' approaching? Did it detect the deceased 'mother' appearing in an unnatural way and immediately leave the area or hide, severing the connection between them?

This explanation is more reasonable, not reliant on coincidence...

Now the question arises, if it wasn't a coincidence, why did the bird-clawed baby appear on this street?

It couldn't possibly just be passing by and happened to bump into us, right? If it truly is the law of convergence, it's still unclear whether it's due to a bloodline connection or a law of repulsion...

Lumian picked up the napkin that was on his lap, folded it neatly, and stood up, pushing the stack of gold hoorn to Lugano.

"I'll take a walk nearby to see if there's anything worth buying; you take care of Ludwig and remember to pay for the meal."

"Sure," Lugano was happy to remain seated without moving.

Lumian left St. Millom Restaurant with a leisurely gait, taking in all the shops and pedestrians along the street.

There were banks, candy stores, cafés, and shops selling Feysacian imported goods, with no suspicious individuals in sight.

The passersby were mostly Feysacians and Raklev locals, the latter often carrying talismans made from their relatives' skulls-some wore them as hats, others strung them into necklaces, and some sewed them onto their clothing at the shoulder.

It is not apparent who might attract the bird-clawed baby and its associates here, nor which building might harbor something unusual... Lumian pondered as he walked along the street, hoping for a "chance encounter."

Unfortunately, this did not happen.

Finally, he finished his stroll along the street and returned to St. Millom Restaurant.

The two Demonesses leisurely enjoyed a lavish Feysacian meal, their prominent position and striking looks drawing the gaze of everyone who came and went. Some even made a point of passing by their table repeatedly.

Lumian took the opportunity to admire the Demonesses' beauty.

Suddenly, a thought struck him:

Ludwig only sensed the bird-clawed baby near St. Millom Restaurant...

Franca and Jenna were right here in the restaurant...

Could it be that they truly attracted the attention of Oxyto, the Shaman King, who personally brought or sent the bird-clawed baby to track them, looking for an opportunity to strike?

Upon discovering the scent of a deceased 'mother' on Ludwig and sensing my Child of God bloodline, did Oxyto abandon his original plan, temporarily leaving this area or completely hiding?

This logic flows smoothly; there's no issue, but how could the guardian demigod of the temperance faction completely miss Oxyto's presence?

A Shaman King is adept at concocting various magical agents and conducting rituals, perhaps using one to evade normal premonitions and intuitions?

Or could it be some other method?

Lumian quickly reviewed the intelligence provided by the temperance faction about the Shaman King.

His steps slowed, seemingly captivated by the beauty and charm of the two Demonesses, reluctant to look away.

After analyzing the information on the Apothecary pathway up to Sequence 4 Shaman King, Lumian considered that Oxyto might have also received a boon, transitioning to female, and he recalled the information he knew about the Heretic Spellmaster pathway.

In a flash of thought, a term came to mind: Paramita!

(Reader's Note: Sequence 4 of the Villain Pathway (boon) allows you to establish a new small world called "Paramita". In this world, when humans die, their souls return to the earth and roam the wilderness. On special occasions, they can return home, be reborn and emerge from the Mother's womb as human foetuses. Also, this sequence turns you into a woman.)

Paramita exists in its own right, dependent on the land, and its activities cannot be detected from the outside...

Did Oxyto use some application of Paramita to evade the gaze of the temperance faction's demigod and follow Franca and Jenna undetected?

Hmm, were those bird-clawed babies taken into Paramita after they crawled out of their 'mothers'?

With Paramita clearly involving the domain of death, were these 'mothers' dead before the bird-clawed babies tore out?

In that case, from birth, they bear a strong taint of death, seamlessly blending into Paramita...

Just now, Paramita was unfolding, watching Franca and Jenna, waiting to make a move, and upon sensing the presence of the deceased 'mother' and the bloodline of a Child of God,

Paramita immediately retracted, cutting off this close connection?

No wonder Ludwig's sensing of the bird-clawed baby was so vague... it was because it was inside Paramita!

Moreover, the local Skull Blessing Festival clearly reveres death, which can be linked to Paramita... Could Oxyto's deep-seated purpose for coming to the Raklev region be hidden in this?

With his speculation, Lumian approached Franca and Jenna's table with a genuine smile and politely asked in Intisian-like any real Intisian would do,

"May I have the honor of sitting here for a few minutes, beautiful ladies?"

Franca replied in amusement, "Are you also from Intis?"

She knew Lumian's approach wasn't simply to chat her up; he must have another purpose, so she played along very cooperatively.

“Yes, which is why I felt a connection as soon as I saw you,” Lumian fully utilized the pickup lines he'd learned from everyday life in Trier.

At a nearby table, several men who were covertly listening in thought simultaneously:

Damn Intisians!

Curse those Intisian playboys!

Jenna's response was natural, tinged with a hint of wariness and surprise. “Are you here in Raklev for travel or business?”

As she spoke, Jenna signaled the waiter, who brought over a chair for Lumian beside their table.

Lumian sat down and said to the two Demonesses, “Your beauty is like something out of a dream. No, even in my dreams, I haven't seen anyone as beautiful as you. You must have caught many an eye along the way?”

Dammit, these sweet nothings are giving me goosebumps! At this moment, Franca would have preferred if Lumian mocked her.

Of course, she was still secretly pleased; after all, she had heard from Browns Sauron that every Demoness who had transitioned from male would have a bit of narcissism-fond of and proud of her feminine self.

Jenna felt both discomfort and amusement, much like encountering a pretentious drunkard while playing a Witch.

Her acting was good; she showed no oddity and smiled mockingly. “Really? Would you dare to look into my eyes and say that again?”

Seeing the handsome young man genuinely sit beside the beautiful ladies and engage in pleasant conversation, seemingly stirring emotions, the surrounding men lamented, How can they be so superficial, only considering looks? That's how you get deceived!

Lumian laughed, looking into Jenna's eyes and said, “The moment I saw you, I knew what true beauty was.”

“...” How can this guy say such things without feeling nauseous? Jenna avoided Lumian's gaze, answering his earlier question, “You know, some gazes make one feel uncomfortable.”

“Any gaze more peculiar than others?” Lumian asked with a smile.

Franca, understanding what he was probing for, shook her head. “No.”

Lumian nodded pensively.

“The weather here is rather cold; did you feel something similar earlier?”

Franca recalled for a moment, pursed her lips, and said, “It started a bit on Chapin Street and lasted until just before the beet soup was served; the soup was warm and made us no longer feel cold.”

Paramita that involves the realm of death made the surroundings feel a bit colder? Lumian said with a smile to Franca, "Perhaps that's the lack of a reliable man's warmth."

Franca's face twitched, and she communicated with Lumian using her eyes and lips.

Please, no more playing the playboy!

As the three conversed, the image of a woman wearing a petite black cap and light golden bun appeared faintly on the surface of a gold-leaf mirror embedded in the wall.

She rested her chin in her hand, her gaze occasionally focused on Lumian and Jenna, then shifting between Lumian and Franca, and assessing Franca and Jenna.

Chapter 763 Folklore Origins

Lumian "kept his promise" and sat at the table with the two Demonesses for only a few minutes before politely taking his leave, leaving the nearby men somewhat perplexed and puzzled.

Shouldn't he have seized the opportunity to pursue further?

Could this be the advanced technique of an Intisian playboy and Dandyist?

Walking back to his own table, Lumian saw waiters carrying a towering stack of plates, their faces a mix of confusion, shock, and fear as they walked away.

All the dishes on the menu had really been devoured!

The look in their eyes towards Ludwig and Lugano was as if they were staring at monsters who had crawled out of the abyss.

If you knew that two-thirds of those dishes and mains were consumed by Ludwig, and Lugano and I only shared the remaining third, you'd be even more scared, worried you might be eaten too. Well, that worry would be justified... Lumian muttered silently as he sat down.

Before him, Ludwig, and Lugano, there was now a slice of apple cake and a cup of richly flavored ice cream.

Ludwig's face was unmasked in satisfaction, the most fulfilled he had felt in a long time.

This was not only because the Feysacian meals were generous in portion and tasty but also because it didn't hurt Lumian to spend someone else's money.

Lumian pushed his slice of apple cake towards Ludwig and appeared to concentrate as he scooped up the milky ice cream with a spoon and placed it in his mouth.

As he savored the melting frost and the spreading taste of milk, he whispered to himself, "Have any of you noticed anything unusual around Two of Cups and Seven of Cups?"

After a brief silence, a faint, ethereal voice echoed in Lumian's ear.

It was from the Knight of Swords Maric.

"We did notice something, from Chaban Street until you approached St. Millom Restaurant, but only a slight abnormality was detected, and we couldn't pinpoint its origin."

This matches Franca's description and my speculation, confirming each other... The temperance faction's demigod is unable to catch Oxyto even though they have started tracking Franca and Jenna... Can we only wait for Oxyto to make a move? Lumian thought for a few seconds and pulled out a pair of non-prescription, plain gold-rimmed glasses for disguise from his Traveler's Bag, placing them on his nose.

He immediately saw the image of the Knight of Swords dressed in a shirt and vest highlighted in the lenses, then disappearing.

The voice of Maric became clearer.

“We occasionally find such slight abnormalities and corresponding traces too, and that is also one of the main reasons we are sure that Oxyto is still in the Raklev area.”

Can Paramita alone achieve this, managing to move undetected under the nose of a demigod with strong spiritual intuition? Lumian, lacking a deep understanding of Paramita, could only speculate based on his past experiences.

He had entered Paramita more than once!

In Cordu, whether in reality or in dreams, he had entered Paramita several times, but at that time, without high-level forces involved, he couldn't judge the normal state of Paramita and whether it could deceive a demigod's senses and intuition when it unfolded; In Trier, during the Tree of Shadow catastrophe, he was involuntarily drawn into Lady Moon's Paramita, which effectively isolated the inside from the outside, preventing Trier's demigods from detecting the growth of the Tree of Shadow and the fighting in that area. It was only through Franca's use of the Judgment card and the unique properties of Madam Judgment that they managed to establish a connection with the outside world, allowing the Tarot Club's demigods to pinpoint and descend into Paramita. At that time, the demigods of Trier were far from Rue Anarchie, unaware of anything hidden there, which could be understood and accepted...

Memories flashed through Lumian's mind, and he always felt that Paramita could not reach the current extent.

When Paramita closed, it was normal that the temperance faction's demigod couldn't sense it even if nearby, but how could it remain undetected after unfolding right under the nose of the temperance faction's demigod?

Is it that powerful?

I think even Lady Moon's Paramita couldn't achieve that, only capable of masking activities and protecting itself through distance from being detected...

Lumian turned his gaze to the window, seeing two locals among the passersby; one had a human skull painted purple hanging on his chest, and the other tied a bleached white human skull on top of his head.

Death worship...

Paramita...

Perhaps, Shaman King Oxyto has developed a special aspect of his Paramita in the Raklev area, which allows him to unfold it in front of a demigod without being detected, at least until there's

substantial interaction... Lumian speculated, piecing together Madame Pualis's plan to use the folklore of Cordu to enhance her own Paramita.

Lumian took another spoonful of milky ice cream and lowered his voice again.

“Tell me more about the origins and circumstances of the Skull Blessing Festival.”

Knight of Swords Maric replied clearly in his ear, “It dates back to the fall of Death, when the situation on the Southern Continent fundamentally changed.

“The fall of Death caused disturbances in the Underworld, leaving most spirits unable to sense or enter it, forced instead to wander its periphery, between the spirit world and the real world.

“As a result, when sentient beings die, they are very likely to become undead, wraiths, or evil spirits—a grave threat to the living, leading to one disaster after another.

“The response of the Northern Continent nations has been Church-sanctioned purification combined with compulsory cremation. Here, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the God of Combat Church have had notable success with purification, making cremation unnecessary for those who have been purified.”

Hearing this, Lumian truly understood and appreciated the various measures taken before and after death, including consoling the dying, purifying the dead, encouraging cremation, and rewarding the discovery of deceased vagrants.

The origins of all these practices was the fall of Death and the subsequent anomalies in the Underworld!

No wonder the old bones in the lower layers of the underground tombs are still bones, not ashes... During the Fourth Epoch, the Underworld hadn't yet been disturbed, and the spirits had a place to return to... Some mysticism knowledge suggests that bodies are prone to transform at the end of the Fourth Epoch during the Pale Disaster, caused by Death's invasion of the Northern Continent. Indeed, it is the legacy of the Pale Disaster; Death perished during that disaster, leading to the anomaly in the Underworld... Lumian suddenly realized, gaining a deeper understanding of certain mysticism knowledge.

The Knight of Swords continued, “The same issues arose on the Southern Continent, but the Balam Empire, home to many Beyonders following the Death pathway, swiftly devised several solutions that quelled the undead outbreaks in certain areas without resorting to mandatory cremation, thus restoring normalcy.

“In other regions, however, due to ongoing independence efforts from countries like Haagenti, Paz, and the Highlands, faith in Death began to wane, leading to a period of rampant undead plagues and a power vacuum. The people in these areas had no choice but to fend for themselves.”

Lumian nodded slightly.

“Is the Skull Blessing Festival a solution for the Raklev area?”

“The Skull Blessing Festival is just one manifestation,” explained the Knight of Swords simply. “According to records left by the Highlands Kingdom, it appears that the people of Raklev, with the help of a former official from the Balam Empire, established a mini-state for the spirits, allowing the dead to enter and rest there without emerging again.

“However, this isn't the Underworld; it cannot truly offer rest, nor can it completely bind the spirits. They just have to gradually fade away.

“The annual Skull Blessing Festival is a day for the spirits to emerge, revel, and be liberated.

Keeping the skulls of loved ones at home helps to protect the family from any spirits that might stray from this mini-state, preventing them from causing harm.”

In essence, they created a rudimentary, localized version of the Underworld for spirits to return to...

A place to return to... The concept of Paramita is similar, where souls return to the earth and wander the wilderness...

Moreover, in Paramita, spirits can return home on special days to enjoy the joy of reunion, much like the Raklev area's Skull Blessing Festival...

The only difference is that here, the spirits have no path to rebirth; they can only slowly fade away... Lumian compared the local state for the deceased to Paramita and grasped something subtle.

He recalled something Louis Lund once relayed from Madame Pualis: What's been established is merely a small, caricature Paramita, a part of the complete Paramita...

Hmm... Lumian inhaled sharply, muttering under his breath, “Could Oxyto be planning to merge this local spirit realm into his own Paramita, to make it more complete?”

“Has he, no, she already partially succeeded, which is why you haven't detected her?”

Knight of Swords Maric paused for a moment before responding, “It's a possibility.”

After a brief pause, he added proactively, “We also haven't seen that spirit realm.”

Seen... Lumian was initially startled but then understood what the Knight of Swords meant.

The Prisoner pathway could directly turn into wraiths, and they should have been able to see the spirit realm, but they found nothing in Raklev this time.

Lumian didn't respond but considered another issue.

If Oxyto has indeed begun to merge with that mini-spirit realm, she essentially becomes a local version of Death, and she must have sensed the Omebella bloodline in me...

What would her reaction be?

Instant anger, or seeing it as something to be exploited?

Why didn't she act directly? Right, she also used the bird-clawed monster baby to discover that Ludwig nearby had the aura of a corpse 'mother,' adding up to what clearly looked like bait, obviously a trap!

That's why she, accustomed to indulgence, held back. What she needs to do now is, seek assistance?

With that thought, Lumian removed his glasses and abruptly stood up.

Chapter 764 There's Always a Corruption That Can Be Used

Lumian took off his glasses and whispered, "The target should have noticed something unusual about me, but Ludwig is right beside me, giving off the 'mother' aura from that corpse. With both of these factors together, the target will surely be highly suspicious and may seek assistance. Be prepared."

If it were just the Omebella bloodline alone, Oxyto might think it was merely the law of convergence at work, bringing the blasphemer of the Child of God into her presence.

Similarly, if it were just the 'mother' aura from the corpse, she might become wary or suspect that the corpse's return to the earth had contaminated the local water, leading to the corruption of certain individuals.

But put together, anyone who could sense these would immediately see there was a big problem.

This couldn't just be a coincidence; there was clearly a dangerous trap!

Knight of Swords Maric's voice seemed to come from farther away.

"We're already ready."

Sensing the hidden danger and preparing even before I thought through everything and issued a reminder? They have strong spiritual intuition and rich experience... Lumian mused as he noticed Lugano, startled by his movements and deep voice, also standing up.

Ludwig wasted no time in pulling the ice cream they had abandoned closer to him and happily ate away, completely unconcerned about what might happen next.

Lumian's gaze swept over Lugano and Ludwig before moving to Franca and Jenna, who were enjoying their dessert.

He was now considering a critical question:

Should they act together, or separate like they did in the morning?

If the earlier speculations were broadly accurate, then the bait phase to lure out Oxyto should already be over. What lay ahead would likely be probing attacks from the Shaman King and her companions.

In that case, moving together would allow them to better receive protection from the temperance faction, without worrying that Oxyto might strike at a less guarded spot and capture one or two as hostages. But if the attack was fierce enough to force the temperance faction's hidden forces into a defensive position, staying together could lead to total annihilation.

Which choice was safer and more reasonable in this environment was a decision the team leader needed to make.

Lumian walked slowly toward the restaurant's entrance, mentally filtering through the questions and speculations he'd considered earlier.

He thought of his own description of the spirit realm in Raklev:

A rudimentary, localized Underworld.

Underworld... Lumian's eyelids twitched, and he quietly asked again, "Can any of you see or sense the Underworld?"

He was asking whether Zombies and Wraiths could detect the Underworld.

Knight of Swords Maric quickly answered, "No, unless someone directly opens the door to the Underworld or is already from there. Otherwise, it can only be sensed through certain traces.

"Before the Underworld anomaly, it was possible."

It was possible before the Underworld anomaly? Is this inferred from ancient records?

Lumian wasn't particularly concerned about this; instead, he was more interested in something else: If Oxyto has indeed begun integrating the local spirit realm into her Paramita, does that mean her Paramita qualifies as a small-scale Underworld?

Moreover, it had to be a small-scale Underworld that was still bound to this region.

Otherwise, based on Lumian's understanding of Paramita, Oxyto could have easily taken her Paramita away and left the area.

Of course, it's also possible that she hadn't achieved another goal yet.

A small-scale Underworld... Lumian muttered to himself and then walked toward Franca and Jenna, smiling as he said, "I heard Chaban Street is unique to this area. Would you two lovely ladies like to be my guides?"

Chaban Street was where Franca and Jenna had first noticed the temperature drop slightly, indicating that they might have encountered Oxyto there.

In the eyes of the nearby customers, Lumian's invitation was a blatant attempt to arrange a date. However, Franca and Jenna exchanged a glance and understood that Lumian was suggesting they should act together, with Chaban Street as their destination.

"Sure." Franca and Jenna smiled in unison and stood up.

This left those around them somewhat stunned:

Are they that easy to invite?

If I'd known, I would have plucked up the courage to ask!

Together, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and the others strolled toward Chaban Street, exchanging relaxed remarks about their impressions of the city.

About fifteen minutes later, they reached the street predominantly occupied by locals.

Gray-white stone houses stood in rows, appearing rugged yet solid. Outside each house, strips of wool hung, adding a vibrant, exotic touch that distinguished it from the Star Highlands.

Compared to other streets in Raklev City, the locals here were more likely to wear traditional clothing: dark red woolen robes for men and brightly colored skirts for women.

Similarly, many of them carried skull amulets of various designs, some mottled and brown with wool wigs, some painted purple, green, and red, and some holding caramel-colored tobacco from East Balam between their teeth. Others appeared as white as jade, with dark eye sockets and insects crawling in and out.

Standing at the entrance to Chaban Street, Lumian paused instead of moving forward, signaling Franca and Jenna to stay slightly behind him.

He then took something out of his Traveler's Bag.

It was a golden mask, with the area around the eyes and the face painted in either black or white.

It was an Eggers family mask crafted by Death Himself!

Since this pure gold mask was initially designed to help the living sense and enter the Underworld and was directly created by the deity who ruled over death and the Underworld, wearing it might reveal something related to the Underworld within a certain range. In the Raklev region, the local spirit realm was akin to a small, rudimentary Underworld.

If the local spirit realm had really been integrated into Oxyto's Paramita, seeing it would be equivalent to seeing that Paramita, revealing Shaman King Oxyto!

Without hesitation, Lumian donned the golden Eggers family mask.

His breath rapidly cooled, becoming increasingly still. His body went cold in an instant, losing the sensation of life, and his blood ceased to flow.

Through the golden mask, Lumian noticed the surroundings dimming slightly, with the colors fading and the temperature dropping a little.

Apart from that, everything appeared normal.

So, this is the world through the eyes of the undead? I can't see any trace of that spirit realm... Is it hidden deeper due to being integrated into Paramita? Hmm, I can sense the spirit world directly but can't detect the Underworld... No wonder one has to wait for an opportunity to enter the Underworld instead of simply locating it and teleporting there after wearing the Eggers family mask... Lumian muttered silently, not giving up on his original theory, and tried to stimulate the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor.

The purpose of activating Alista Tudor's lingering aura was to highlight the seal left by the Underworld Daoist.

This powerful being from Franca's world was clearly related to the pathways of Death, Darkness, and Warrior. According to Madam Magician, He might have also had contact with the deranged Death and made some agreements. His seals could potentially enhance the Eggers family's masks.

As a slight pain pricked his right palm and the cold, rotten sensation spread, Lumian's vision abruptly changed.

Along the entire Chaban Street, the fabric strips hanging from the walls lost their color and turned gray, while the people walking there became inexplicably blurry, as if shrouded in thick fog.

However, the skull amulets they wore remained unusually clear, their colors even more vivid by contrast.

Lumian also saw pale or dark red flames ignite in the hollow sockets of those human skulls, flickering and exuding an eerie chill of death.

In that instant, Lumian realized he was “seeing” the spirit realm of Raklev.

It overlapped with the entire Raklev area, where spirits wandered in the shadows while humans lived openly.

Standing on the edge of the spirit realm, Lumian didn't attempt to step inside but instead searched from a distance for any signs of Paramita's presence.

He saw a vast black cloud hanging over the sky in the direction of Lake Dalsh, saw some skulls floating mid-air on the streets with ghostly child-like figures flickering within their burning sockets, and saw how the wilderness below the mountains seemed to have encroached directly, blending into the city seamlessly.

As expected... Lumian immediately had a clear realization:

Oxyto is inside this Paramita, which has merged with the spirit realm!

With this understanding, the first thought that flashed through Lumian's mind was: My mission ends here. Next, I'll lend the Eggers family's golden mask to the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction, leaving them to organize their forces to enter Paramita and fight Oxyto, while we return to Trier to avoid the potential danger.

But on second thought, Lumian realized that wouldn't work.

Because if they only had the Eggers family's golden mask and not the Underworld Daoist's seal, even a Wraith wearing it wouldn't be able to directly “see” Oxyto's mutated Paramita!

A possibility vaguely came to Lumian's mind.

He said in a low voice to the hidden Knight of Swords Maric, “I've found Oxyto's Paramita. First, take the Two of Cups and the others to safety. Then, as Wraiths, attach yourselves to me, and I'll lead all of you into Paramita!”

“Alright.” The Knight of Swords somewhat ethereal voice couldn't conceal his joy and malice.

It was directed at Oxyto.

Chapter 765 Howl

Lumian thought for a moment and then specifically reminded, “Don't forget the Four of Swords.”

To be honest, he almost overlooked Anthony's presence, but because he was constantly thinking about what his teammates were doing and how to coordinate with them, he didn't forget entirely.

When he invited the two Demonesses to Chaban Street at St. Millom Restaurant, Lumian didn't think of Anthony right away. It was only when he reached the street that he remembered their teammate. But he couldn't find the Hypnotist, who had used Psychological Invisibility. He could

only trust that Anthony, with his rich experience, would realize that once the rest of the team had gathered together, it was clear the next actions weren't suited to splitting up, and he would follow.

Anthony's habits as an information broker combined well with Psychological Invisibility.

After a two-second pause following Lumian's reminder, the Knight of Swords said, "We won't forget."

It seems like you already did... but the temperance faction's demigod shouldn't be affected much by Anthony's Psychological Invisibility, so when sending Franca and Jenna away, they shouldn't really forget about Anthony... If that's the case, one major cause of death for a Hypnotist would definitely be that Psychological Invisibility works too well, causing teammates to forget or overlook them... As Lumian mused to himself, the special Paramita before him suddenly changed.

A deafening crash sounded from Lake Dalsh as gray-white water surged upward like a tsunami, reaching into the air. The wilderness, already intertwined with the city of Raklev, began to dominate. In an instant, it crossed squares and streets, swallowing Lumian, who had not yet reached Chaban Street, while avoiding Franca and the others.

Oxyto, blessed by the Great Mother, seemed to realize she had been exposed.

Her choice was to use the nature of Paramita to temporarily separate the blasphemer of the Child of God from the temperance faction's demigods, then exploit the brief time difference to achieve her desired goal regarding Lumian.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian, wearing the Eggers family's golden mask and transformed into an undead, felt his body grow "heavier," as if cold masses had taken residence inside him.

In the next second, he saw the indistinct human figures on Chaban Street vanish, along with Franca, Jenna, Ludwig, Lugano, and possibly Anthony behind him. It was as if they were in two separate worlds.

The human skulls in various states became increasingly distinct, their eye sockets burning with pale or dark red flames as they all turned to face Lumian.

At the end of Chaban Street, at the city's edge where it blended more deeply with the wilderness, swaying figures crawled out from unknown places and began walking toward Lumian.

There were rotting long-haired oxen with only a few pieces of pus-oozing flesh left, giant birds with exposed bones flying low, pythons dragging half-melted threads of flesh between their decaying tissues, and monstrous hills made of multiple headless skeletons.

Human skulls from all corners of the city were also swiftly converging on Chaban Street, floating in the air and covering the sky, blocking out the pale, dim, and heatless "sunlight."

Lumian appeared stunned, as if he had encountered something terrifying, or was like an undead creature facing a higher-ranked and more terrifying kindred spirit. For a brief moment, he stood frozen, unable to move.

Just then, a wretched howl, filled with pain, echoed from Lake Dalsh.

The terrifying and piercing sound was like a high-speed spinning drill that bored directly into Lumian's soul. His vision went dark, and he lost consciousness.

When Lumian regained his thoughts and awareness of his body, he found himself midway along Chaban Street, accompanied by the Knight of Swords Maric, who had appeared at some point, dressed in a black vest and white shirt.

All around him, crystalline cold had frozen human skulls of varying states in mid-air, on the ground, and on the surfaces of gray-white stone buildings.

The surreal frozen scene stretched all the way to the wilderness on the outskirts of the city.

In the staggering army of undead creatures, the rotting monsters shed flesh onto the ground, leaving only bones-yellowed, brown, or bleached white. The skeletal remains sank into the soil, and droplets of crimson blood, not their own, oozed from the surface.

Meanwhile, the wraiths and evil spirits swelled like balloons and burst silently, turning into strange dust.

Although Lumian didn't fully understand what was happening, two thoughts sprang to mind: Have they all been cursed?

Even the fleshless bones were cursed to bleed?

With that thought, Lumian couldn't help but raise his right hand and wipe his nose.

He immediately noticed some blackened bloodstains on the back of his hand.

This came from within his body, blood that had long since stopped flowing.

In the banshee's wail just now, not only was his soul wounded, but his undead body seemed to have suffered physical damage too. Some capillaries had ruptured, causing the blackened blood to seep out.

Terrifying... Lumian had roughly figured out what had just happened.

Oxyto screamed from a distance, using the Banshee's Howl enhanced by Paramita, and! instantly lost consciousness.

Did the temperance faction's demigods attach themselves to me as wraiths before Paramita expanded, pulling me into Paramita right away? Then, they took over my body and used their abilities to deal with the swarming army of human skulls and undead?

The Knight of Swords also attached himself to me, which is why he's now in Paramita?

After grasping the recent encounter, Lumian had a clearer and more accurate understanding of the terror of demigods: Oxyto isn't even a full Angel but just a Banshee's Howl knocked me unconscious, robbing me of my ability to fight. It took me over ten seconds to wake up... Without the presence of temperance faction demigods, those ten seconds would have been more than enough for Oxyto to kill me ten times over...

This isn't something a drawn demigod can compare to. Facing a real demigod, if I don't seize the initiative, I won't even have the chance to draw the Sword of Courage or use Desire Incarnation!

There's no time for the animated shadow to take the damage for me unless I anticipate it in advance...

With these thoughts swirling, Lumian regained control of his body.

Then, he heard the Knight of Swords, Maric, mutter softly, "Oxyto has retreated. She should be near Lake Dalsh.

"We still don't know what kind of help she's seeking."

"Lake Dalsh?" Lumian asked in mild surprise.

That serene, beautiful, sacred lake?

On second thought, it makes sense. All mining operations in the Raklev region have avoided Lake Dalsh, leaving it entirely unpolluted...

The Knight of Swords surveyed the surroundings but didn't immediately dash off into the wilderness toward Lake Dalsh.

He nodded slightly and said, "Lake Dalsh itself is special, connected to the fallen Death. The establishment of this small spirit realm in the Raklev region was made possible due to Lake Dalsh.

"That former Balam Empire official even used an Undying's skull from the Church of Death and, using his Gatekeeper powers, opened a door to the Underworld and fixed it onto the Undying's skull. This prevented it from completely closing too quickly, allowing a bit of the Underworld's aura to leak out."

"The skull of an Undying? Undying can die too?" Lumian instinctively asked.

The Knight of Swords started walking towards the edge of the frozen world.

He glanced at Lumian and said, "An Undying is only Sequence 4 in the Death pathway. They can still die if killed."

I see... Lumian nodded almost imperceptibly.

The Knight of Swords continued, "The aura leaking from the Underworld, the unique traits of the Undying's skull, and the special nature of Lake Dalsh all worked together to sustain this spirit realm, drawing the souls of dead creatures in the region and letting them gradually wither away."

After listening, Lumian froze for a moment.

"You seem to know a lot about the local spirit realm..."

The Knight of Swords replied, "The Rose School of Thought ruled here for over a thousand years. Apart from the uniqueness of Lake Dalsh, everything else was long understood."

"Then why didn't you say so earlier?" Lumian blurted out.

If you'd told me sooner, I might have guessed Oxyto's intentions earlier!

"We didn't initially connect Oxyto to the spirit realm, so that intelligence wasn't included in the information," explained the Knight of Swords. "After that, I answered whenever you asked, but didn't elaborate. Speaking is also a desire that requires temperance."

“...” Lumian suddenly understood how Franca felt every time she heard him say, “I’ll have to start with the events at the Samaritan Women’s Spring, where Madame Hela and I...”

While talking, he and Maric reached the edge of the city, where the frozen world met the desolate wilderness.

Lumian instinctively glanced at the thick layer of ice encasing the gray-white buildings.

Using the reflective surface, he was astonished to see a blurry figure in each of his eyes.

One wore a small black bonnet and a court dress of the same color; the other had no head and was dressed in a dark, intricately patterned, sinister gown.

Lumian then noticed translucent-ringed insects crawling in and out of his mouth, yet he felt nothing.

...

At the entrance to Chaban Street, Franca, Jenna, and the others felt a sudden chill engulf them and saw Lumian vanish before their eyes.

Before they could communicate or react, a voice, slightly magnetic and ethereal like a dream, echoed in their ears: “I’ll send you back to Trier first.”

Franca, Jenna, and Lugano instinctively turned their bodies and discovered that a young-looking man had appeared next to them at some point.

He wore a white shirt, draped in a thin black trench coat. With black hair and green eyes, he had a night-like, handsome quality, and wore a pair of red gloves on both hands.

Chapter 766 Early Labor

Gazing at the young man wearing red gloves, Franca cautiously asked, “Who might you be?”

She wasn’t about to trust a stranger just because of what he said unless influenced by some Beyond power.

“Two of Cups, Seven of Cups. You don’t need to be involved in what’s coming next,” said the young man in red gloves directly, calling Franca and Jenna by their Minor Arcana names.

His voice carried the natural authority of someone used to leading many people, instilling a faint sense of fear in Franca and the others.

He knows our Tarot Club codenames... A member of the Tarot Club? One of the Knight of Swords’ helpers? His outfit looks like those “Red Gloves” from the Church of Evernight Goddess... As Franca pondered, she didn’t sense any warning from her spiritual intuition.

Before she could respond, the young man in red gloves pulled out a tarot card.

The card’s front depicted a goddess pouring holy water under a sky full of stars.

Major Arcana, The Star!

So, it’s Mr. Star... Franca and Jenna hesitated no longer and nodded in unison, saying, “Okay.”

Lugano stood there, a bit dazed.

Why did he take out a card?

I think I've heard of something like this, but I can't remember...

Almost simultaneously, Anthony appeared out of nowhere and squeezed in beside Franca and Jenna.

Franca was startled for a moment, muttering to herself, "I really did forget about you..."

Mr. Star didn't say much more. He opened his mouth slightly.

In an instant, Franca and the others were enveloped by a vast, invisible spirit, and then they ascended into the layered, colorful spirit world, like they were traveling in a hot air balloon.

...

Along the city's periphery, covered in crystalline ice, Lumian, wearing the Eggers family's golden mask, withdrew his gaze.

He could roughly guess that the blurry figures in his eyes were the temperance faction's demigods responsible for this operation. One of them, headless, seemed to resemble the temperance faction's Angel he had seen before. The translucent insects crawling in and out of his mouth were likely helpers invited by the temperance faction.

How many people have taken residence in my body just now? Lumian grumbled internally as he followed the Knight of Swords, Maric, in a mad dash.

They entered the wilderness outside Raklev under the pale, cold "sunlight," heading swiftly toward Lake Dalsh.

Due to the unique influence of Paramita, Lumian couldn't teleport anywhere beyond his line of sight. He had to use a visual lock to establish a position, which made it challenging to appear instantly at the edge of Lake Dalsh.

After running some distance, he reached out and grabbed the Knight of Swords' shoulder.

Almost simultaneously, blazing white flames surged from within him, instantly covering his entire body.

The Knight of Swords understood his intent without asking and promptly dematerialized into a wraith, attaching himself to Lumian.

Lumian transformed into a white-hot spear and shot off into the distance in a brilliant display.

The flaming spear streaked through the sky, crossing vast distances to arrive at the edge of Lake Dalsh in no time.

As Lumian detached from the blazing white spear, he noticed that even in Paramita, intertwined with the spirit realm, this lake remained tranquil, clear, sacred, and beautiful.

In the dim surroundings, the gray-white water seemed weightless, stretching upwards like a giant curtain, perhaps drawn to some high-altitude entity.

In front of the water curtain, countless human skulls formed a mountainous head.

Among the skulls of various colors, one stood out the most. It was at the very top, crystal clear as if carved from crystal, and significantly larger than a normal human skull.

Instead of pale or dark red flames, the eye sockets of this crystal skull reflected a mysterious, intricately patterned, ancient bronze door.

The door was slightly ajar, revealing endless darkness within. In that darkness were countless indescribable eyes, staring out yet unable to emerge.

Along the edges of the bronze door, strange, grotesque, and sometimes revolting hands grasped the frame as if trying to squeeze through but unable to. They only managed to scratch out piercing noises that seemed to tear at the human eardrum.

Many spirits and human skulls were drawn to this place, gradually becoming part of the massive head.

Is that crystal skull the Undying's skull used back then? Is the bronze door in its eye sockets the Death Sequence 5's Gatekeeper's door to the Underworld? Hmm, a Sequence 5 can't keep the Underworld door open for long, so they used the Undying's skull and the unique properties of Lake Dalsh to fix it... But where has Oxyto, the Shaman King, gone? As this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he saw the countless human skulls forming the massive head in the air open and close their bony teeth, speaking in unison in various voices: "Why couldn't you give me a little more time?"

"If I can't have it, I'll destroy this place and see how many of you can survive the calamity of this collapsing Paramita!"

"And I have already abandoned this place and left the Raklev region using my prior preparations!"

"Hahaha, hahaha!"

Amid the sharp, hoarse, old, and deep laughter of the human skulls, Lumian felt the massive shadow in the sky descend toward his head. Cracks appeared in the ground below, growing deeper and revealing a dark void.

All the skulls, including the crystal one, developed tiny cracks, seemingly ready to shatter completely in no time.

At that moment, Lumian felt a chill leave his body, and all the skulls stopped cracking as if temporarily held back by an invisible external force.

This also halted the process of Paramita's collapse and destruction. Although it didn't reverse, it wasn't going to happen immediately.

Is this the temperance faction's demigod or their invited helper using their ability? It seems Oxyto really escaped. After testing the waters with the Banshee's Howl, she decisively abandoned this Paramita, clearly stronger than other Madames, and used her prior arrangements and the unique properties of this place to escape before the temperance faction could act... A series of thoughts flashed through Lumian's mind as he took in the scene before him.

An ancient voice suddenly echoed in his ears: "Don't just listen to what Oxyto says."

“In my experience, anyone who leaves behind so many words before running away is either already insane or trying to cover up something.

“Oxyto did indeed flee here decisively before we locked onto her and planned to destroy this Paramita, but why would she tell us her objectives? Purely to vent her emotions?”

“That may be one reason, but there should be a more important one: she wants us to focus on the collapse and destruction of this Paramita and overlook something else.”

Lumian hadn't entirely dismissed his doubts after Oxyto's proclamations through those human skulls, but such behavior wasn't unusual for the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought.

Those accustomed to indulgence were always eager to express their emotions.

The ancient voice finally said, “Time will provide us the answer.”

As soon as these words fell, Lumian saw the insects with translucent rings flying out.

Suddenly, everything around him slowed down.

A grayish-white fog settled over everything Lumian saw, making it all look surreal.

Soon after, everything projected on the foggy “curtain” started to rewind. The human skulls were no longer cracked in countless places, the ground returned to smoothness, and the thick shadows receded into the sky.

Time wasn't moving backward; rather, recent history and events were being displayed.

Lumian then saw a pair of brown wings that could blot out the sky, leaving the current shadow behind.

Between the wings, each feather as large as a human head, stood a female figure with an exposed abdomen.

The woman was as beautiful as the moon at night, her face radiating maternal brilliance, but her hands and feet were arched, with sharp nails that gleamed coldly.

This was the Shaman King, Oxyto.

Having seen her male form, Lumian recognized her instantly. Her features were softer now, and her facial details were more delicate.

Her belly was swollen, stretched taut with black veins visible on the surface. The skin was so thin that it was almost transparent, revealing the merging forms of numerous bird-clawed monster infants inside.

She... stuffed all those corpse-born bird-clawed infants into her belly... What kind of monster is she nurturing? No wonder the bloodline connection didn't work directly, only indirectly within a certain range... As Lumian came to this realization, Oxyto reached for her belly in the scene from the past.

With a tearing sound, she ripped her abdomen open, blood pouring out.

Oxyto forcefully pulled out an infant slightly smaller than Ludwig. Its skin was pale, its flesh decayed, and remnants of four or five heads and seven or eight bird claws remained on its surface. A pure, clear membrane, seemingly from Lake Dalsh, covered the baby's body.

Oxyto let out a cry of agony as she threw the infant into the eye socket of the crystal skull.

The rotten, multi-headed infant was clearly much larger than the eye socket and the bronze door within it, yet it mysteriously shrank smaller and smaller until it squeezed through a gap barely wide enough for a hand, disappearing into the boundless darkness behind the door.

Is Oxyto's ultimate goal to send that monster infant into the Underworld, making some terrifying thing a reality? And now she's been forced into early labor? As Lumian had this thought, he realized the coldness inside him had vanished.

The figure in the small black bonnet and the Knight of Swords in the vest and shirt simultaneously appeared in front of the crystal skull.

But they seemed unable to pass through the crack in the bronze door and were trying to open it a little more.

The Underworld... Wearing the Eggers family's golden mask, Lumian felt a stirring inside.

Seizing the opportunity provided by the temperance faction demigods stalling Paramita's collapse, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting to the front of the crystal skull.

In his eyes, the bronze door loomed abnormally large.

He stretched out both hands and pressed them on either side of the bronze door.

A hollow, muffled buzzing filled the air as the bronze door opened a little wider.

Lumian immediately felt a terrifying suction, and with a swish, he was pulled through the crack, flung deep into the darkness.

Inside him, two more cold masses joined him.

Chapter 767 Underworld

With Lumian vanishing before the crystal skull, the human skulls, already covered in countless cracks, lost their support.

They shattered with a thunderous crash, bringing down the shadows from above and splitting the grassy wilderness into fragments.

Oxyto's Paramita crumbled toward the cracked crystal skull, and everything there silently turned to dust.

The spirits dissipated, the light vanished, and the void of darkness swallowed everything.

No one knew how much time had passed before a gentle light began to glow in the absolute blackness, revealing a barren, dim, pale, and almost frozen wilderness.

In the center of the wasteland lay the tranquil and sacred Lake Dalsh.

The headless lady, draped in a dark-black dress and carrying four heads, swiftly appeared beside the lake, quietly gazing at its serene, transparent surface.

...

As soon as Lumian was pulled through the bronze door, he felt countless eyes upon him, chilling his body further and numbing him.

Meanwhile, arms of unknown origin reached out, grabbing at his head, neck, torso, and legs.

Some had dull skin with white, bony teeth; others were so decayed that their flesh was falling off, slowly wriggling with equally decayed worms; some lacked skin altogether; others were merely illusory Spirit Bodies...

What they all shared was a bone-chilling cold that could freeze the soul.

On Lumian's face, the golden mask painted with black and white oil sparkled with a faint yet pure light. The reaching arms halted momentarily before retracting.

The eyes watching him from the darkness also withdrew their gaze.

Lumian regained his thoughts and his sense of his body.

Below him, he discovered a deep pit with no visible bottom or boundaries.

The edge of the pit was made up of layers of blurry worlds, spiraling downward to the limits of his vision.

These jumbled worlds layered atop each other, and Lumian couldn't make out what lay within them, only knowing that each was vaster than the Star Highlands, with all previous watching eyes stemming from the pit's bottomless dark.

Lumian plummeted suddenly, falling into one of these blurry worlds in the blink of an eye.

Miraculously, he stood on a barren wilderness exposed with gray-white rocks, surrounded by heaps of bleached bones, densely packed and stretching toward various distant places.

At this moment, these bones lay still, as if slumbering through time.

Is this the Underworld? I wonder where the Abscessed Hand's body part might be. Lumian looked around, muttering to himself in silence.

(Amonoculus' note: It is the contracted creature that gave him the traverse the Spirit World. Lumian must find its body parts or else he cannot achieve godhood. According to Fors, one of the body parts is located in the Underworld.)

It was the chance to enter the Underworld that had prompted him to help voluntarily, using the Eggers family's golden mask and the Underworld Daoist's seal to push open the bronze door inside the crystal skull.

Now, the problem was that the Underworld was much more vast than he had anticipated, and he had no idea where to start looking.

Similarly, the whereabouts and intentions of the decaying infant that Oxyto had sent were unknown.

Perhaps I could rely on the contract I had signed with the Abscessed Hand. Essentially being part of the same body, they are mystically connected. The contract I had signed is, to some extent, also with

the rest of its body... Lumian quickly formulated a plan and spoke in a cold, hoarse voice, "Knight of Swords, have all of you entered as well?"

"Yes," came the faint voice of the Knight of Swords, Maric.

Pausing momentarily, he added, "A companion of mine has also entered."

Lumian nodded. "Why aren't both of you coming out? You are now in a wraith state, so there's no need to worry about dying instantly in the Underworld."

You're essentially undead beings now; what's there to fear about the Underworld's unique conditions?

The Knight of Swords responded, "But we are fundamentally still living beings. If we stay in the Underworld as wraiths for too long, we won't be able to revert to human form and will forever exist as wraiths or evil spirits. By using your body, we can temporarily avoid the influence of the Underworld, emerging only when it's crucial."

"I see..." Lumian looked up at the pale, dim sky, "I also can't wear this Eggers family's mask for too long. We have about three hours."

As he spoke, Lumian tried to activate without using the black mark on his right shoulder, which was the Abscessed Hand's Spirit World Traversal ability.

With this mark, he faintly sensed something at the end of the wilderness on his right calling to him.

Is that the body part of the Abscessed Hand in the Underworld? Just as Lumian had this thought, a figure appeared ahead.

It was an extremely delicate-looking young woman with an unnaturally pale complexion. Her deep blue eyes were profound and devoid of any emotional fluctuation; her light golden hair was tied in an atern bun adorned with a small black bonnet with a fine black veil, and she wore a complicated, exquisite black Gothic court dress.

Is this the temperance faction demigod that was attached to me earlier? Lumian recalled the two blurry figures he saw through the crystalline ice.

One of them matched the lady before him perfectly!

The temperance faction's demigod floated in mid-air, slowly turned around, and then pointed in a direction, nodding at Lumian.

She was pointing toward the end of the wilderness on the right.

"Do you mean that Oxyto's prematurely born, decayed child might be over there?" Lumian asked for confirmation.

The lady in the black bonnet nodded gently in affirmation.

She then vanished into thin air, and Lumian felt another chill inside him.

It's all in that direction, huh... A coincidence? No, not a coincidence, it's more likely that something in that direction is drawing them there... Lumian turned his body, ready to teleport to the edge of his vision.

As soon as Lumian started to become transparent, his body was suddenly grabbed by pale hands that appeared out of nowhere, seizing his arms.

Lumian felt a paralyzing sensation throughout his body, as if his soul was being torn apart by an invisible force.

This time, the faint glow from the golden mask had no effect.

Lumian attempted to ignite a blazing white flame to ward off the cold, stiffness, and numbness, but he was overwhelmed by an invisible terror, trembling uncontrollably, unable to respond effectively.

When he regained his clarity and composure, he found himself still standing in the same spot, but surrounding layers of bleached bones had all risen up, encircling him as if to protect him.

At the same time, Lumian heard the voice of the Knight of Swords, Maric: "Once you put on the Eggers family's mask and become a pure undead being, you will also possess all the traits of an undead, one of which is being suppressed by higher beings of the Death pathway, making it difficult to resist and your body and mind willing to accept enslavement.

"In contrast, we wraiths, who aren't pure and can switch states freely, are less affected."

Was this why I couldn't resist just now? I wonder if the Sword of Courage can counteract this effect. It theoretically should... Lumian realized with a start. "Did both of you save me just now?"

The Knight of Swords didn't continue on this topic but instead reminded Lumian, "It seems that in the Underworld, you can teleport but not teleport freely, as that is considered a desecration of Death and attracts the punishment of the Underworld" According to the mystic knowledge mentioned by Madam Magician, teleporting should be normal in the Underworld since it stems from the spirit world, but considering it as desecration of Death seems a bit too strict, typical of the oppression by higher-ranking beings of the Death pathway... Lumian pondered for a few seconds, slightly bending his back.

A blazing white, radiant spear of flame immediately shot forth, illuminating the pale, dim half-sky, casting towards the far reaches of the wilderness.

As the white and red trail of the flame spear disappeared inch by inch, Lumian, transformed into the spear, hurled himself forward at the fastest speed he could achieve.

During this process, he noticed the wilderness sloped downwards, and the destination he, the Knight of Swords, and the temperance faction demigod aimed for was at the bottom of this 'hillside'.

After a while, the blazing white light scattered in all directions, and Lumian, now clad in a thick jacket, descended toward the ground.

Ahead of him lay a wide, surreal black river, so vast he couldn't see the other side.

The river flowed silently from the edge of the sky to its limits, exceptionally quiet.

"Is this the River Styx?" Lumian inquired of the temperance faction demigod within him.

Responding to Lumian was still the Knight of Swords, Maric: "It should be. It spans every layer of the Underworld. Crossing it is like entering the depths of the Underworld. If you hadn't stopped

earlier and ended up flying above it, you would have fallen straight into the river, and no one would have been able to pull you out.”

Good thing the issue with teleporting just now gave me a warning: it's best to pause in uncertain environments... Lumian glanced left and right, noticing the wilderness was dotted with withered blood flowers, each concealing a multitude of corpses, bones, and shadows.

“How do I cross?” Lumian sensed that the missing part of the Abscessed Hand's body was on the other side of the River Styx.

No sooner had he asked, and before the Knight of Swords could respond, a dilapidated, gloomy black boat suddenly appeared on the shadowy river.

A figure draped in fragments stood on the boat, rowing with a long oar, guiding the vessel to Lumian's side before stopping at the river's edge.

Peering closely, Lumian saw that the ferryman was a severely decayed male corpse. Large portions of his body were exposed, and his eyes appeared gouged out, leaving hollow sockets entwined with thick blood vessels oozing yellow pus.

“Take this boat across?” Lumian asked, lowering his voice to consult the temperance faction member inside him.

Knight of Swords Maric replied in an ethereal but slightly grave tone, “It's the only way... But be careful of the boatman. The Underworld has mutated, and it could be affected too.”

Chapter 768 Ferryman

Lumian nodded, his right hand naturally falling on the Traveler's Bag.

He then walked over to the dilapidated, gloomy boat, noticing the severely decayed boatman turning aside to make way, as if signaling for him to hurry aboard.

“Can you ferry me across the Styx?” Lumian asked politely in Dutanese.

Given that the former Death hailed from the Southern Continent, Lumian figured that speaking Dutanese might be more readily accepted by “all parties” in the Underworld.

After all, in an environment so rich with the stench of death that a living person couldn't last a second, using mystical languages like ancient Hermes, which could manipulate natural forces, might have unexpected effects. For instance, merely uttering the words “River Styx” could forge a strong connection with the dark, ethereal river before him, possibly causing it to whip up a massive wave and sweep him away.

The boatman, its eye sockets filled with thick blood vessels and oozing yellow pus, faced the river, wide enough that the opposite bank was out of sight, and remained motionless.

It seemed it was answering Lumian with his actions:

Why would you try to communicate with a corpse?

I can't hear you, nor can I make a sound.

It seems ordinary language won't do... I've heard that the Death pathway includes a Language of the Dead, but unfortunately, I don't speak it... Lumian muttered to himself quietly as he let his eyes take on a silver-black hue and slowly stepped onto the rickety, gloomy boat.

In his Eye of Calamity, the boatman's destiny was pure black, dead and void, showing no signs of change.

Does this mean no matter how much the boatman struggles, it can't change its status as a corpse, and its only fate is to wither away with time until even its existence vanishes?

But that doesn't mean the boatman can't do anything during this time before its demise. Its actions can still affect the fates of others, including mine and other undead beings. From this perspective, the boatman, or rather the summoned undead, should still have a destiny, only that the outcome cannot be changed...

Indeed, they have destinies, but my current rank isn't high enough to see them, is it? After all, objects have destinies too, but I can't see them now...

It might also be that the destinies of the dead need to interact with others to manifest in the destinies of those others...

Perhaps because he had temporarily become an undead himself, Lumian couldn't help but ponder the destinies of these "residents" of the Underworld.

With the mystical knowledge he currently possessed, he couldn't define destiny precisely, nor did he know how much the mercury river of fate encompassed, or whether there were unseen aspects or hidden parts he wasn't aware of yet.

He felt there must be, which stemmed from a few simple questions:

Could it be that by donning the Eggers family's golden mask and becoming an undead, the river of fate that still existed for me simply disappears, turning utterly black and void?

And when I take off the mask, does the river of fate instantly return?

What then is the river of fate? A plaything at our disposal?

Although the golden mask of the Eggers family was made by Death, it didn't contain Beyond character characteristics and was only of a higher rank.

It surely wasn't simple enough to manipulate the river of fate so easily!

Later on, if there's a chance, I should have a Monster pathway Beyond observe my fate to see the changes before and after donning the golden mask...

Uh... never mind, unless I find a demigod-level Monster pathway Beyond, otherwise it would only harm them. Even when I had only Mr. Fool's seal, the false angelic rank, and the residual aura of the Blood Emperor, the patrol team's 'machine' Kolobo from Port Pylos was already too afraid to look at me, thinking it would bring him great danger. Now, I have also added the Underworld Daoist's seal and Omebella's bloodline...

Lumian positioned himself at the center of the battered boat, allowing the golden mask to turn his eyes iron-black.

He wanted to preemptively spot the boatman's weaknesses to prepare for any potential mishaps.

At that moment, the highly decayed boatman began to row, slowly steering the dark boat towards the other side of the surreal, shadowy river.

His body was entirely cloaked in dark colors, and Lumian struggled to find any sign of a vulnerable pale spot amid the black.

Of course, these dark colors also meant that the boatman was completely vulnerable to sunlight and lightning.

The next second, Knight of Swords Maric's voice rang in Lumian's ears: "Its weaknesses might not be here."

Not here? What do you mean they're not here? Can weaknesses be separated from the person? Just as Lumian was filled with intense curiosity, he remembered several stories his sister had once told him.

In those stories, a type of monster called a lich would create phylacteries and hide them in heavily protected, secret places. As long as the phylacteries were not found and destroyed, the lich would not truly die, effectively separating its fatal weakness from itself.

(Amonoculus' note: phylactery 𐤑 either of two small square leather boxes containing slips inscribed with scriptural passages and traditionally worn on the left arm and on the head by observant Jewish men and especially adherents of Orthodox Judaism during morning weekday prayers.)

And in the twenty-two paths of the divine, such things were hardly surprising.

The Knight of Swords continued, "Were you trying to discern its fate earlier?"

"It holds a considerable rank; this is a dangerous endeavor."

A considerable rank? Lumian glanced at the boatman, draped in tattered clothes and highly decayed flesh, unable to see anything particularly formidable about it.

However, the fact that it could ferry across the River Styx without sinking into it certainly suggested something extraordinary.

Lumian diverted his gaze, closely watching the boatman's every move, patiently waiting as the dilapidated boat made its way across the River Styx to the opposite shore.

The battered boat rocked slowly, as if it might fall apart at any moment, taking what felt like an eternity to reach the middle of the river.

Suddenly, the highly decayed boatman raised its long oar and turned toward Lumian.

As the gloomy boat came to a halt, the boatman's mouth abruptly opened, splitting down to its decayed chest, its hollowed-out navel, and further down to its groin.

Its body unfolded like a coat unbuttoning, stretching out to the sides, revealing no darkened organs or bones of its own, but rather a heap of half-melted, decayed limbs.

Once again, Lumian felt a chill that made him shudder, daring not to harbor any thoughts of resistance.

He clenched his right hand, which had been ready.

He grasped the Sword of Courage from the Traveler's Bag, holding the hilt of the iron-black broadsword.

Courage swiftly filled Lumian's body, prompting a manic smile on his face.

What is there to fear from a mere boatman?

Even if Death Himself stood before me, I would strike Him down with my sword!

Lumian drew his broadsword, now ablaze with white-blue flames, and slashed fiercely at the boatman, who was lunging at him with its skin peeled open.

With a thud, the Sword of Courage cut through the pile of melting limbs in the boatman's stomach and struck the layer of rotting skin riddled with holes behind its chest.

But the broadsword failed to split the seemingly fragile, decayed skin.

As Lumian readied a second strike, one accompanied by a massive explosion, the boatman swiftly recoiled, slowly closing its opened chest and abdomen.

At the same time, the voice of the Knight of Swords rang in Lumian's ears: "Stop. We've got it under control"

"This is our chance to finish it off!" Lumian responded without hesitation.

He and the Knight of Swords were communicating in Intis.

The Knight of Swords paused for a second and said, "I know, you're not afraid of it, and you could kill it, but if it dies, we can't cross the River Styx."

Seeing Lumian calm down a bit, the Knight of Swords added, "Besides, killing it won't grant you any Beyonder characteristics. It's merely the skin of the true Ferryman. It seems to have been consuming other corpses, trying to regain a body but never succeeding."

Lumian accepted the Knight of Swords' explanation.

Having courage didn't mean being deaf to others' words, it's just selectively ignoring dangerous warnings.

He then placed the Sword of Courage back among the ordinary straight swords in the Traveler's Bag.

This time, he didn't feel the post-event fear because this was the purpose of using the Sword of Courage. The only thing he feared was:

A demigod's skin has been peeled off? What in hell happened in the Underworld back then?

Lumian watched as the boatman slowly and struggle-fully pinched together the split skin and rotting flesh on its chest, like buttoning up a coat.

Following this, the boatman plunged its long, dark, decayed oar into the surreal shadowy River Styx, moving it at an even slower pace as if resisting something.

Has the demigod of the temperance faction possessed the boatman, forcefully taking control and making it continue to row? It looks like this control is met with strong resistance... Lumian remained ready to draw the Sword of Courage again in case of any unforeseen incidents.

As the gloomy boat rocked its way towards the opposite shore of the Styx, Lumian, having nothing better to do, started a conversation with the Knight of Swords.

“I saw the entire Underworld as a series of descending layers earlier. Crossing the Styx should just get us to the other side of this layer, so why did you say it's like entering deep into the Underworld?”

The Knight of Swords simply replied, “The geography of the Underworld doesn't completely align with the real world. According to the many notes of the Eggers family, there are two ways to enter the depths of the Underworld. The first is to descend layer by layer through the worlds encircling the Styx, which are used to punish sinners, ultimately arriving at the realm where the Blessed of Death reside. The second is to cross the Styx directly.”

“Is that so...” Lumian mused aloud, “So, our destination is the realm once inhabited by the Blessed of Death?”

The Knight of Swords paused for a second and said, “Death's palace should be there as well.”

The palace of the former Death? Lumian's eyelids twitched at the thought.

As he and the Knight of Swords alternated between silence and conversation, the boundary on the other side of the Styx finally came into view.

Chapter 769 Incomplete Corpse

Unlike the wilderness Lumian and company had passed through earlier, strewn with grayish-white rocks, the soil on this side of the River Styx was pitch black. There were no withered blood-colored flowers, no ghostly skeletons, and no decaying corpses to be seen.

The sky above was no longer lit by pale, dim, cold “sunlight.” Instead, a rich darkness dominated this boundless world.

Deep within the darkness, clusters of pale-white, greenish-hued flames hung quietly in mid-air, spaced far apart as if serving as street lamps.

Using the illumination from the nearest pale flame, Lumian quickly leaped from the gloomy boat to the shore.

Once his feet hit solid ground, his heart steadied considerably. As he crossed the River Styx, the scent of death in his undead body became more intense and evident, while his spirit and consciousness, tightly protected by the Eggers family's golden mask, felt a slight chill.

Following that, a sinister coldness pervaded his body, but the highly decayed boatman, with its hollow eyes, simply reinserted its long oar back into the river's current.

It made no new move to attack Lumian.

It seemed incapable of attacking targets on the shore.

Watching the gloomy boat and the boatman, now facing away from him, slowly drift away, Lumian mused, “Not going to finish it off? With its rank, that decayed human skin would match your messenger quite well” This referred to the Knight of Swords' messenger, the Half-Fairy, a spirit being missing the outer half of her body, meaning she was precisely lacking human skin, while the boatman was just the peeled skin of a demigod from the Death pathway.

The Knight of Swords was silent for a few seconds, letting his voice echo in Lumian's ears: "She only lacks her own skin."

This reply was curt and restrained, yet Lumian almost heard the Knight of Swords roar: Don't just find any skin for my messenger to wear!

Pausing for a second, the Knight of Swords continued, "We might need to return across the River Styx, and we don't know how many Ferryman are left there."

A need to return across the Styx? Lumian then pondered a very serious and important question.

"After dealing with Oxyto's child, how do we leave the Underworld?"

Clearly, this was not something that could be solved by teleportation.

"Our allies in the outside world should be seeking help from the Death pathway's Sequence 5 Gatekeeper or a corresponding demigod, which might necessitate our return to the peripheral areas of the Underworld we were in before, to access the bronze doors of the Underworld."

Lumian nodded, following a vague sensation brought on by the black mark on his right shoulder, and took a step forward.

He didn't ask the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod if he was veering off the path to find Oxyto's child.

If he were wrong, they would inform him.

Reaching the nearest pale flame, Lumian realized it truly served as a street lamp.

It was crafted from gold, shaped like a kneeling figure with hands bound behind its back, its head tilted back and torso bent outward.

A dark, sinister wick protruded from the statue's mouth, coated in a layer of pale yellow translucent grease. The pale-white flame burned quietly, seemingly for thousands of years without a hint of extinguishing.

From this human-shaped lamp onward, the ground was covered with dark, cracked stone slabs.

Lumian could imagine just how solemn and solemn the path to Death's palace must have been.

(Amonoculus' note: Not sure why the official translation has used the word solemn twice here.)

He walked along the path, which was inexplicably cracked and shattered, quickly but cautiously heading deeper into the darkness, towards the place suspected to hold the Abscessed Hand's body part.

The path also presented a slightly downward trajectory.

This reminded Lumian of Hotel Orella he had once stayed in, recalling the words spoken by Iveljsta, a descendant of Death-many believed that the true hell and the origin of death lay deep underground, so one had to continually descend, delving deeper and deeper.

This is reflected in the Underworld too... After walking for a while, Lumian suddenly conjured a large, blazing white flame in his hand.

The bright light quickly dispelled the darkness further away, allowing Lumian to clearly see the surroundings: Mausoleum-style buildings were either completely collapsed or half fallen, deathly quiet, with no bones or bodies. These buildings varied in color, not just black, but also pale-white, golden, dark red, and sinister green.

“Did the Blessed of Death once live in these houses?” Lumian asked the Knight of Swords, who was well-versed in the history of the Southern Continent and the legends of the Underworld.

The Knight of Swords replied succinctly, “I don't know” He then added, “Only by finding a creature that entered and exited the Underworld before the fall of Death can we be sure.”

“Alright...” Lumian didn't press further and quickened his pace.

This was because he felt that the body part of the Abscessed Hand was not far ahead!

His right hand went back into the Traveler's Bag, ready to draw the Sword of Courage at any moment.

As for the Devil's Whispers ring, he didn't plan to wear it yet; he didn't think becoming undead would immunize him against the malevolent effects unleashed by that Sealed Artifact.

Undead beings could harbor malice too!

After all, undead beings such as wraiths and evil spirits were formed around the core of their own obsessions and residual malice.

Moreover, Lumian's spirit and consciousness were still protected by the golden mask of the Eggers family, remaining in a living state.

After a quick jog, guided by the pale-white flame of the human-shaped street lamps and the blazing white orb above, Lumian discovered a grand structure along the side of the cracked stone slabs.

It appeared to be a cathedral, entirely black and about fifty to sixty meters tall, but its upper half had already collapsed into the lower part.

Lumian concentrated, listening intently, and heard faint, strange sounds emanating from the grand but ruined cathedral.

It was as if someone was using a blunt sword to slice through flesh and saw through bones, causing a headache to the listener.

“I have another matter to resolve inside this cathedral,” Lumian finally disclosed his intent to the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod.

He then firmly added, “It should be quick.”

He remembered what Madam Magician had said: the true danger of the Abscessed Hand would only manifest once all its parts were assembled, and currently, two parts were still in the City of Exiles Morora, so there was no need to worry about that.

The enemy he might face next could be the undead being creating the sound just heard.

“Alright,” the Knight of Swords did not inquire about the specifics.

“Thank you,” Lumian responded sincerely.

The Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod neither objected nor disengaged from Lumian's body, indicating their tacit approval to provide the necessary assistance when needed.

Lumian extinguished the blazing white orb hovering above his head to avoid provoking the undead within the dilapidated cathedral.

He transformed into a shadow, blending into the areas not illuminated by the pale-white flames, and silently infiltrated the building whose upper half had entirely collapsed inward.

From the shadows, Lumian saw columns thrust into the ground, a dome shattered into pieces, and a bird statue broken in half.

After winding through the ruins for a while, Lumian's path brightened suddenly.

Ten meters ahead on a crumbling wall, several bone torches burning with pale green flames were inserted, the dense darkness above streaming through a large hole created by the collapsed dome, blocked outside by this dim light.

Beneath the bone torches, a long table made of grayish-white stone was set up, upon which lay a half-corpse, head severed and vertically split open.

The corpse wore no clothes, its body bluish-black and swollen with decay, oozing yellowish-red pus everywhere.

It appeared significantly larger than a normal human, unclear whether it was a half-giant in life or merely bloated by post-mortem gasses.

Lumian recognized it instantly-this was the body of the Abscessed Hand!

It comprised the left half, including one hand and one foot.

In front of the Abscessed Hand's corpse stood a towering figure, about four meters tall. The figure's skin was pitch-black, etched with numerous sinister patterns, most of which had decayed, exposing bare, ghostly white bones or appearing as half-melted, viscous tissue.

At that moment, this figure, bent over, was slowly cutting into the half-corpse of the Abscessed Hand with an even larger pale-white leg bone, likely from another unknown source.

Lumian noticed two curved, tattered black goat horns growing from the figure's head, its profile resembling a fusion of human and goat features, becoming increasingly terrifying the longer he looked.

An undead being transformed from a Beyonder of the Devil pathway after death? Just as Lumian had this thought, he saw the goat-faced giant slice off a chunk of bluish-black decaying flesh and stuff it into its mouth, chewing vigorously, causing pale yellow pus to splatter.

On the half-corpse of the Abscessed Hand, the decaying flesh writhed and grew, filling in the cuts made.

A cycle of one eating, the other growing? Lumian was pondering a plan to take the Abscessed Hand's corpse when the Devil-like undead suddenly turned around, looked towards the shadows where he was hiding, and spoke in an unintelligible language using a hollow, decayed voice.

Though he couldn't understand the words, Lumian felt a strange pulsation in his flesh, compelling him to leave his shadow form and revert to his undead appearance with the golden mask.

However, the decaying, goat-faced Devil did not take the opportunity to attack.

After two seconds, the voice of the Knight of Swords reached Lumian's ears: "It's asking: 'Do you need flesh?'"

Do you need flesh? Lumian was first stunned, then relieved that he had a translator.

Looking at the hunched-over, Devil-like giant undead, Lumian suddenly had a strange thought: Is this considered making a deal with a Demon?

Has the aftereffects from using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction finally caught up with me?

Chapter 770 Egg

For a moment, Lumian was unsure whether the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, a Beyond item from the Broker pathway, actually had negative effects.

On the one hand, encountering a deal with Demons and other evil beings surprisingly prevented a potential battle. Without this "negative effect," Lumian suspected he would have been attacked the instant he was spotted by the goat-faced Demon, instead of being asked if he needed flesh. This seemed like a manifestation of how a Shadow Merchant could reduce the malice from dangerous creatures and mysterious entities.

However, it was definitely wrong if this wasn't considered a negative effect. Dealing with a Demon wouldn't be simple or easy. It might even be very dangerous, even if the Demon was already dead.

After a few seconds of deliberation, Lumian, pointing to the half-body of the Abscessed Hand on the grayish-white stone table, asked, "I want it all. What must I give in return?"

He planned to gauge the difficulty of the transaction first. If it proved too challenging, he would ask for help from the temperance faction demigod to confront and collectively eliminate this decaying goat-faced Demon!

Having a deal offered by a Demon didn't mean you had to accept it!

As soon as Lumian spoke, he felt his body stiffen and a coldness spread within him.

He understood what was happening and didn't resist or struggle, then found himself involuntarily speaking in a gravelly, metallic voice, as if using dead vocal cords.

His words were repeated in an unknown language by the goat-faced giant, and every word struck a chill into Lumian's spirit, feeling as though they were piercing his Spirit Body.

Bent over and goat-faced, the black-skinned decaying Demon responded in the same hollow language, its voice echoing ominously.

One of the words seemed to grasp Lumian's Spirit Body and body as if by a giant hand.

If it weren't for his "dead" state and the protection of the Eggers family's golden mask, just this interaction alone could have severely harmed him.

Soon, the ethereal voice of the Knight of Swords resonated in his mind: "I want Farbauti dead!"

Farbauti? The Devil Monarch, Farbauti, the true form of Naboredisley?

The terms of the deal require me to kill an ancient god? Lumian narrowed his eyes at the towering goat-faced devil, regaining control of his voice to say, "That's an ancient god. I can't do it. Change the terms."

If the goat-faced devil refused to change the terms, then there was no need for negotiation!

Facing an ancient god might be beyond me, but taking you down certainly wasn't!

It was just a matter of owing a favor to a demigod!

That debt could be repaid slowly over time!

It was unclear whether it was the Knight of Swords or the temperance faction demigod who then took control of Lumian's body, translating his words into a language the goat-faced Demon could understand.

This also brought Lumian a strange sensation.

The goat-faced Demon, capable of standing four to five meters tall but appearing only a bit over three meters due to its bent back, fell silent for a moment before speaking in a deep, hollow tone, "I want that egg."

Egg? Lumian muttered to himself in confusion.

He understood directly because the Knight of Swords had already translated it synchronously.

"Where is this egg?" Lumian inquired.

As a member of the temperance faction took control of his mouth to relay the question, the decaying goat-faced Demon let the massive thigh bone in its hand drop to the ground with a loud thud.

"In the palace," the goat-faced Demon answered simply, making the Knight of Swords' job of translating much easier.

This also made the Knight of Swords' translation job much easier.

Lumian asked, seeking confirmation, "The palace of Death?"

Could a former divine residence be extremely dangerous?

The goat-faced Demon's eyes, oozing blood and pus, shifted slightly.

"Yes."

An egg within Death's palace... Lumian hesitated between agreeing to the deal or just seizing it.

As he surveyed his surroundings, he further inquired, "What does this egg look like?"

While waiting for the member of the temperance faction to translate, Lumian noticed a broken statue by a half-buried stone pillar, with only parts of its body remaining.

It was vaguely recognizable as an avian statue, its feathers seemingly woven from mystical patterns, pale-white and dim.

An avian statue... Lumian thought, connecting this with the egg the goat-faced Demon wanted.

Once the translation was finished and control of his mouth returned, he added, "A bird's egg?"

After about ten seconds, the goat-faced Demon dragged its pale thigh bone forward a few steps, which scraped against the ground, producing a grating sound.

The goat-faced Demon spoke slowly and intermittently, "Yes. It's large. Black, within flames."

It really is a bird's egg, and obviously from an abnormal mother...

Birds... Lumian suddenly remembered the prematurely born child they were tracking, associated with the Banshees in their full might.

They resembled birds, with claws and wings!

Although there are clear differences from this bird statue, they are at least all birds... Moreover, since there is an abnormal bird's egg inside Death's palace, it implies the existence of a mother, a mother in the mystical sense... Lumian vaguely grasped the reason Oxyto had conceived such a stillborn and cast it into the Underworld.

Was her goal also this egg, to use it to do something to the Underworld?

Whether integrating the realm of the dead in the Raklev region into her own Paramita or conducting a ritual to impregnate corpses and bear children, was it all for this purpose?

Sheesh, does she intend to merge the Underworld with her own Paramita?

That's quite ambitious, isn't it?

This is a legacy of a true god, a former divine kingdom!

But if Oxyto really succeeds, wouldn't the Great Mother be able to descend directly?

Even if she can't fully merge the Underworld just yet, just planting a seed is still a very dangerous thing for our world!

Lumian immediately asked the goat-faced Demon, "Have you seen a giant baby with bird claws?"

The decaying goat-faced Demon looked at Lumian but did not respond. It was unclear whether it hadn't seen such a thing, or if the influence of the Broker pathway was limited to the transaction itself.

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "Deal!"

The goat-faced Demon's head moved almost imperceptibly. It turned and began dragging its pale thigh bone, step by step, back to the grayish-white stone table where the half-body of the Abscessed Hand lay.

Lumian, lowering his voice, shared his recent thoughts with the Knight of Swords and the temperance faction demigod.

Knight of Swords Maric quickly responded, "Let's head to Death's palace right now."

Seemingly to reassure Lumian, the Knight of Swords added, "You're wearing the Eggers family's mask. Many dangers in the Underworld will naturally avoid you. We only need to worry about anomalies like the boatman. And if Oxyto's monstrous child can get close to Death's palace, close to

that bird's egg, then we should be able to as well. Even with the premature birth and the powers inherited from Oxyto, it's at most equivalent to a Sequence 4.”

Upon hearing the Knight of Swords say so much in one breath, Lumian pondered and said, “Its state of existence and birth ritual are quite unique. It might be able to harness some of the Underworld's power. Even if it hasn't reached the Angelic level due to being premature, we must treat it as a Sequence 3 demigod in the corresponding environment.’

After all, this was a baby born through the integration of Paramita and the spirit realm, facilitated by Lake Dalsh. And this baby had undergone gestation within a corpse, birth post-mortem, and then returned to its original form through a process of mutation and integration.

It absolutely couldn't be considered a living creature, for living beings would instantly die in the Underworld.

“Yes,” the Knight of Swords answered succinctly.

Under the pale glow of a few bone torches mounted on the broken wall, Lumian asked the two members of the temperance faction within him, “If we continue along the path we were on, into the depths of the darkness, will we reach Death's palace?”

Lumian remembered that the Knight of Swords had mentioned reading many notes from the descendants of Death.

Before the Knight of Swords could reply, the goat-faced Demon standing at the gray stone table suddenly lifted the large pale thigh bone.

It used the bone to point toward a dark, deep hole that had been smashed open by a dome-shaped stone block near the broken statue.

That seemed to lead to the dark cathedral's basement.

Lumian paused, then blurted out, “You mean, this leads directly to Death's palace?”

Based on the Knight of Swords' explanations and what he had seen earlier, Lumian believed Death's palace was situated at the bottom of the dark Underworld. One would have to keep heading downward, deep into the ground, to reach it.

But since it was a descent, jumping directly into the seemingly bottomless “basement” might also be feasible.

Emperor Roselle once said, “All roads lead to Trier!”

The decaying goat-faced Demon nodded slowly.

It was only then that Lumian realized: This fellow understands my Intis language! Why did I even bother getting a translator? Is a Demon still a Demon even after death?

Lumian didn't waste any time confronting the decaying goat-faced Demon. He ran a few steps to the edge of the dark, vast hole.

He formed a clump of blazing white flame and placed it at the edge of the hole, illuminating some of the interior: massive stone pillars, blackened wood racks, collapsed stone slabs, and a winding staircase extending downward, disappearing into the darkness.

“No problem,” the Knight of Swords conveyed the judgment on behalf of the temperance faction demigod. “It leads to Death's palace.”

Without hesitation, Lumian jumped onto the partially collapsed staircase.

Instead of running down the stairs in the usual way, he jumped back and forth between stone pillars, wood racks, staircases, and walls in a linear free-fall.

During this process, Lumian occasionally transformed into a blazing white flame spear to leap over completely collapsed parts without footholds and at other times turned into a shadow creature to navigate around special areas.

The surrounding darkness seemed to hide something, something even the blazing white light couldn't illuminate, but Lumian ignored it, pretending not to notice.

After descending for an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian's feet finally touched the ground.

In the light of the blazing white flame, he saw that the area was littered with broken bones, some white, some yellow-brown, and some dark brown.

Not too far from Lumian, a deep black stone wall stood, set with a heavy wooden door large enough for a giant to pass through.

Lumian walked up to the door, bent over, and extended his palms, beginning to push outward with all his strength.

His instincts told him that beyond this door lay Death's palace.