

CIRCLE OF INEVITABILITY

Chapter 9: Magazine

As the night settled in, Lumian finished dealing with his neighbors who had come to borrow the oven. He made his way up to the second floor, entering the room that served as Aurore's study.

In Cordu, many folks were destitute and couldn't afford their own ovens or large stoves. When they needed to toast bread or smoke meat, they had to borrow it from others and use it on the spot.

Aurore had always been lenient and accommodating when it came to this. Anyone could borrow her oven, but they had to pay the fuel costs or bring their own coal and wood.

Currently, she had donned her white silk nightdress and was curled up in a reclining chair, her focus solely on the book she held under the bright battery-powered lamp on the desk.

Lumian didn't wish to disturb her, so he nonchalantly pulled out a thinner book from the bookshelf and took a seat in the corner.

Hidden Veil... What kind of magazine is this? Lumian pondered, gazing at the cover that was adorned with cryptic symbols.

He swiftly flipped through the pages, and the more he read, the more he was taken aback.

This magazine delved into the very existence of the human soul. It discussed how all beings had a spirit, and through secret methods of communication between different spirits, one could obtain various kinds of aid.

Even if one wasn't devout, even if they only attended the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral to pray and partake in Mass occasionally, two words couldn't help but flash through Lumian's mind: *Sacrilege! Taboo!*

As a Warlock who would undoubtedly be burned at the stake by the Inquisition if her true identity was exposed, it was customary for Aurore to have such books at her residence. However, Lumian could tell that this magazine had received the government's permission for publication!

Can such a thing be openly published?

Didn't they say that publication censorship had always been very strict?

Or is this a fake permit... Lumian looked up at Aurore and inquired, "Is this a prohibited magazine?"

Aurore took her eyes off her book and glanced at her brother. She responded in a nonchalant tone, "In the past, it was underground fiction. Later on, for some reason, it cleared the censors and was officially published. The Eternal Blazing Sun Church actually didn't care and tacitly agreed."

"Fiction?" Lumian was taken aback by his sister's choice of words.

"Of course, it's fiction. You're not taking it seriously, are you?" Aurore laughed. "If what's written is true, do you think it can still be published? If you follow the method written on it, other than making yourself mentally weak and neurotic, there won't be any additional gains. Yes... there will occasionally be something real, but without the corresponding ritual language, it'll be a waste of effort no matter how hard you try."

This was the professional evaluation of a Warlock.

"Alright..." Lumian couldn't hide his disappointment. "I just find it strange that this can be published."

Aurore took a deep breath, her puffed-up cheeks accentuating her pondering.

"I don't know why either. Perhaps it's because the world has been seeing an influx of supernatural events lately, and it's becoming increasingly difficult to conceal them. The public is becoming more aware of their existence, and the government is slowly easing its grip on such topics. That's why books like these are being published. In Trier, *Psychic*, *Lotus*, and *Arcane* are the most popular magazines. I have them all on my bookshelf. If you want to come up with more realistic stories for the tavern, you should give them a read."

"Oui," Lumian responded eagerly, his interest piqued.

Simultaneously, he let out a wistful sigh deep in his heart.

Aurore's hoard of books was truly impressive and diverse!

Thanks to these tomes and Aurore's occasional elucidations, Lumian—a lad who had forsaken his schooling—had managed to acquire a reasonable comprehension of the world, continent, and nation he called home.

The world was divided into two great continents, one to the north and one to the south, separated by the treacherous Berserk Sea, where raging hurricanes battered any who dared to sail its waters. But the truly mysterious lands lay to the east and west, on the legendary Eastern and Western Continents. No one had ever set foot there, and some wondered if they even existed at all.

Lumian and Aurore lived in the Intis Republic, a land situated in the heart of the Northern Continent. It was a nation bordered by the Fog Sea to the west, the Feysac Empire to the north, and the Hornacis mountain range and the Loen Kingdom to the east. To the south lay the Feynapotter kingdom, Lenburg, and Masin.

The small countries nestled between the Feynapotter Kingdom and the Loen Kingdom, such as Segar, together with Lenburg and Masin, were collectively known as the countries of the south-central region. They shared a common faith in the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.

The Southern Continent had already fallen under the dominion of the various powers of the Northern Continent. Whether it was the Balam Empire, the Paz Kingdom, the Haagenti Kingdom, or any of the other nations, they had all but lost their autonomy. Yet still, a fierce resistance against colonization burned in the hearts of the conquered.

In addition to the Berserk Sea dividing the Northern and Southern Continents, there were other great seas: the Fog Sea to the west of the Intis Republic, the Sonia Sea to the east of the Loen Kingdom, the North Sea to the north of the Feysac Empire, and the Polar Sea to the south of the Southern Continent. They were collectively known as the Five Seas.

Of all the nations of the Northern Continent, the Loen Kingdom was the strongest, with the Intis Republic close behind. The Feysac Empire, defeated in the last war, had fallen to fourth place. The Feynapotter Kingdom had risen to third place. And among the countries of the south-central region, Lenburg reigned supreme.

Compared to the simple folk in Cordu who only knew of the Intis Republic, the Feynapotter kingdom, and Lenburg, Lumian was practically a cartographer.

It was no surprise really, considering the Cordu Village shepherds only traveled to their neighboring kingdoms of Feynapotter and Lenburg. They only had a limited understanding of these lands. The people in the northern villages of the Dariège region were just as provincial. Other than the surrounding settlements, they could only name Trier, Suhit, and a few other metropolitans.

Lumian was often baffled. *How did Aurore come by such vast knowledge?* All the textbooks he read were penned by Aurore, and all his practice exams were prepared by her. Aurore had an answer for every question in the books he read!

But what stunned him even more was her expertise in various forms of combat.

It was simply mind-boggling that a woman in her twenties could accumulate so much wisdom. Some people couldn't amass that much knowledge even after living 50 or 60 years.

Could it be that these are the building blocks of a true Warlock? Lumian looked up again and gazed at Aurore, lost in thought.

As Aurore patted her cheeks while reading, she hardly seemed like a scholar or a warlock.

Aurore caught Lumian's gaze and demanded, "What are you ogling at?"

Lumian quickly changed the subject, "Last time you mentioned that I possess the knowledge required to pass the college entrance examination?"

Aurore pondered for a moment before responding, "In theory, you could gain admission to any university, but since I never took that particular exam, I can't say for certain what questions will be asked. Roselle sure did a number on the populace. Sigh, I guess it's a good thing..."

Undoubtedly, Emperor Roselle's reign spawned the college entrance examination, and it has remained a fixture of academic life to this day.

Aurore's mind suddenly shifted gears. She shot Lumian a sly grin and inquired, "Why did you not make your usual stop at the tavern today to regale the patrons with your tales?"

"I'm not truly an alcoholic," Lumian replied while flipping through his magazine. "Reading at home is equally enjoyable."

And it helps to calm my nerves and ease my mind... Lumian silently added. Aurore nodded and glanced over at Lumian's spot in the corner of the room.

"Why are you sitting so far away, putting on an act of pitifulness, weakness, and helplessness?"

"Come closer. You need proper lighting to read at night, otherwise, your eyes will suffer."

Aurore sure has a way with words, Lumian mused. Although I understand the meaning behind "pitifulness," "weakness," and "helplessness," it's still an odd combination. Supposedly used to her idiosyncrasies by now, Lumian retrieved a chair and moved closer to the desk where Aurore sat.

The two of them spent the evening reading in silence, occasionally chatting, as the sound of their breathing mingled with the rustling of pages and the soft breeze that wafted in from outside the window. Peaceful and soothing.

...

As he bid Aurore goodnight, Lumian slipped back into his quarters.

He peeled off his coat and draped it across the back of the chair. He couldn't risk bringing the Wand card to bed with him; that would only raise suspicion, and his sister had sworn to keep a watchful eye on him at all times.

Just as he was about to approach the bed, Lumian froze, his heart skipping a beat.

His sharp eyes darted around the room, and he adjusted the chair that was usually positioned at a diagonal angle to face the window.

Then, he crawled into bed and extinguished the kerosene lamp resting on the cabinet next to him.

As he drifted off into the depths of slumber, Lumian was suddenly startled awake.

The bedroom was shrouded in a dense, gray fog.

Lumian, who was already mentally prepared, calmly took in his surroundings and made a realization.

The chair that he had meticulously arranged before retiring for the night was still positioned at an angle in his dream, just as it had been in reality in the past.

This suggested that the dream world he had entered was not an exact reflection of reality. Perhaps it was a manifestation of his deepest subconscious desires. Although Lumian couldn't decipher its meaning, he knew that it was something to be remembered.

He walked over to the window, placed his hands on the sill, and gazed out.

The mountain made of brownish-red stones and reddish-brown soil, and the collapsed buildings that surrounded it, were still present.

The eerie silence of the place was deafening.

Time quickly passed. After much contemplation, Lumian made a firm decision.

He would embark on a preliminary exploration of the area tonight!

His past life on the streets had turned him into a man of action.

He didn't rush downstairs, however. Instead, he opened the cabinet and began to pile on clothes.

He didn't need them to keep warm, but he wanted to increase his "defense ability" in this way.

He grabbed a cotton shirt, cotton pants, and a leather jacket, stretching his body to feel the fit. Any more clothing would only hinder his agility, and that was crucial in a situation like this.

As he adjusted to his current state, Lumian had a sudden thought.

This is my dream. Can't I get whatever I want?

With that intention, he muttered to himself, "I want a breastplate and a revolver... I want a breastplate and a revolver..."

The room was still shrouded in a thin, gray fog.

This won't do. This dream is special... His disappointment was palpable, but he quickly regained his composure and made his way to the bedroom door. Stepping out into the corridor, he found himself in complete darkness. It was murky and dim.

Lumian pushed open the door to Aurore's bedroom and then her study. The layout was slightly different from reality, but he recognized it immediately. The biggest difference, of course, was that Aurore was nowhere to be found. The entire scene was frozen in shades of gray.

The first floor was no different.

Lumian scanned his surroundings, searching for a weapon to defend himself. He knew his home better than anyone else and quickly found two viable options.

The first was a two-meter-long fork made of steel. Aurore had said that it was effective and outstanding as long as the target didn't have a long-range weapon.

The second was a sharp, iron-black hand axe.

Ah, why not both... Lumian couldn't help but think of Aurore's oft-repeated phrase, but he quickly dismissed the idea.

Today was all about reconnaissance. He needed to be sly, hidden in the shadows.

Lugging around a cumbersome weapon would only hinder his movements and give him away.

Taking a deep breath, Lumian stooped down to retrieve the axe.

He rose to his full height and set off towards the door, barely visible in the misty haze.

With a deft hand, he opened the door, not making a sound.