

Lord of Mysteries 2: Circle of Inevitability

Chapter 22 Arrangements

Lumian awoke to the world shrouded in a faint, gray fog.

With practiced ease, he bounded out of bed and rushed to the window. His gaze fell upon the mountain, a towering behemoth of brownish-red stones and reddish-brown soil that loomed in the wilderness beyond.

Despite its modest size, a mere twenty or thirty meters tall, the mountain seemed to stretch endlessly upwards, piercing the very heavens themselves. Lumian found himself using the words “mountain peak” to describe it, so profound was its impact on him.

Beneath its massive frame, the ruins of dilapidated structures encircled the desolate wilderness, stacked atop one another, layer upon layer.

Judging by the shotgun-wielding monster’s build, I’d say it’s highly skilled in both running and jumping. It also appears to possess a degree of intelligence, capable of wielding a weapon as complex as a shotgun...

It has incredibly strong tracking abilities, and I can’t discount the possibility that it possesses some sort of superpowers, much like Aurore...

...

As Lumian focused his mind, details of the target began to surface.

His initial judgment was grim—if he attempted to face the monster with the shotgun, his chance of survival was a meager 10 percent. And if he tried to utilize his special trait, it would only hasten his demise. His meditation was a double-edged sword; it pushed him to the brink of death, making him vulnerable to even the slightest strike from the enemy.

Sneak attacks and assassinations were not viable options either. The other party possessed an uncanny ability to track his movements, rendering any attempts at stealth futile. Plus, Lumian lacked the necessary equipment to mount a ranged assault. A revolver would have been a godsend.

For the past two days, Lumian had wracked his brains trying to come up with a plan. And finally, a solution presented itself: traps!

He had ventured deep into the mountains with the village hunters, where he mastered the art of setting traps. Since then, Lumian had become a pro at pulling off a few practical jokes.

Lumian's initial plan was to use oil as a weapon. His idea was to fill a large bucket with oil, tie a rope to it, and hide it somewhere high. When his target approached, he would yank the rope, causing the bucket to tip over, drenching the unsuspecting victim with oil. Then, he would light a torch and toss it at them.

However, after some deliberation, he gave up on the idea.

On the premise that the creature had strong tracking abilities, he knew he had to overestimate its sense of smell.

The smell of oil was quite obvious, and if he used other stronger smells to cover it up, he wasn't sure if the other party would react differently. The monster might even be able to distinguish even the slightest abnormality, like wild dogs.

In the end, Lumian chose to dig a deep pit and plant stakes at the bottom.

He knew that there was a certain problem with this plan. With the tracking abilities displayed by the monster, there was a high chance that it would discover the anomaly in advance and see through the trap.

Lumian's response was to find a way to exploit its blind spots and lower its guard.

His weapons were inferior to the creature's, but he hoped his intelligence could give him the upper hand. As a human, he had one advantage: his brain.

At least from our last encounter, it possesses a certain degree of intelligence, albeit not quite that high... Lumian comforted himself.

But he refused to let this lull him into a false sense of security. He would plan assuming that the creature had the cognitive abilities of an average human being.

Someone like Pons Bénet.

No, that guy's IQ is lower than a pile of rocks. If it weren't for all his goons, I'd have him bowing down to me and calling me daddy. After a moment of contemplation, Lumian raised his expectations of the monster. Yes, treat it like an uneducated padre.

He gazed out the window again, his eyes fixated on the wilderness between his dwelling and the ruins.

This place was closer to the "safe zone," making it the ideal location for his hideout. However, there was no cover, leaving everything exposed in plain sight, making it unsuitable for an ambush.

“It’s fine to dig a trap, but if I use myself as bait, the other party will be able to spot me from a distance and shoot me. It won’t need to come over at all...” Lumian muttered, contemplating whether to take the risk of entering the ruins to set up a trap.

His plan took shape rapidly, with one thing left to confirm: it would take a lot of time to dig a deep pit and plant stakes below. Lumian couldn’t expect the other party to wait until he was done.

After a moment’s reflection, Lumian opened his arms and made an “embrace the Sun” gesture. He prayed more fervently than ever before.

“My God, my Father, please bless me and aid me in dealing with that monster.

“Praise the Sun!”

There was no 100% certainty for most things in the world. Lumian didn’t hesitate for a moment. He grabbed the pitchfork and axe from the bedroom and proceeded to the study.

Considering the target’s weapon, Lumian knew he had to switch up his protection gear.

He shed his cotton clothes and lashed hard-bound books to his chest and back with a rope.

This was makeshift paper armor!

He vaguely remembered his sister warning him about the potential for internal injuries, but he couldn’t afford to worry about that now.

He stretched to make sure the weight of the books wouldn’t impede his fighting abilities, then donned his leather jacket and headed down to the ground floor to gather materials for his trap.

Not long after, Lumian’s grip tightened on the shovel and bundle of ropes at his waist, one for climbing and the other for crafting rope nets to replace the tree branches.

He breathed deeply, steeling himself for what lay ahead, and gripped the iron axe in his right hand as he opened the door.

A faint gray fog crept through the wilderness as Lumian approached the mountain, the peak now dyed in blood.

Lumian made his way through the eerie silence, creeping towards the edge of the ruins.

With caution, he walked a distance to the side and tossed his shovel, pitchfork, ropes, and other gear into a dark corner of a collapsed building. With only his trusty axe in hand, he returned to the spot where he had entered the ruins.

Moving quietly and deliberately, Lumian crept deeper into the ruins without drawing attention to himself.

When he finally reached the spot where the three-faced monster had scared him off last time, he paused for nearly a minute before turning back.

Halfway there, he began to detour, circling back towards the collapsed house where he had stored his tools.

As he approached, Lumian scanned the terrain, searching for a suitable location to set up his trap.

There's a relatively wide and short crevice here. With a little modification, it'll make an excellent trap and save me precious time. As for the other one, well, that might take a while. But I'll just have to hope the monster won't find me too quickly...

Lumian retrieved his shovel and other gear, turned back to the chosen location, and set to work.

After modifying the crevice, Lumian wielded his axe and sliced off a jagged piece of wood, then inserted it into the trap's base. He crafted a net from rope, draping it over the trap before covering it with soil, ensuring that it blended seamlessly with its surroundings.

With everything in place, he began to mimic the monster tracking him.

If this creature is as perceptive as I think it is, it will sense the trap and avoid it, perhaps leaping over it in a single bound. However, it would inevitably reach this spot...

I need to be here, so it spots me the moment it arrives... Lumian measured the distance with his feet and confirmed his line of sight before settling on a relatively intact wall.

He squatted there and confirmed his line of sight.

Then he began to dig a second trap.

This was a trap specifically designed for "normal humans."

Lumian knew that when someone had managed to track down their target and easily realized that the other party had laid a trap for them, only to discover that the enemy was lying in wait nearby, they'd probably get cocky. Their thirst for success would

overwhelm them, and they'd ignore the possibility of a second trap, eagerly lunging at their prey.

It was a classic flaw of people with pedestrian intelligence.

Lumian just prayed that the monster didn't possess the average IQ of a human. If it did, he had no choice but to bolt. Odds were he'd be ensnared and left to die in the wild, with a slim chance of making it back to his house and hiding in the "safe zone."

Cordu's abnormality had forced him to make a dangerous choice.

With every passing moment, Lumian grew increasingly wary. Even though he had set up the second trap, the monster with the shotgun had yet to make an appearance.

The same held true for the other monsters.

At last, Lumian began to relax. After stowing away his shovel and other supplies, he stood tall, spreading his arms wide.

"Praise the Sun!" he exclaimed with renewed vigor.

Lumian shrank back against the wall and fell to his knee, his eyes fixated on the first trap.

There was no clear line of sight to the path he took, obstructed by a collapsed building looming in his way.

He waited there, patiently, his heart thumping in his chest. Lumian could feel the adrenaline pumping through his veins, and the sensation was unprecedented.

As a vagrant, Lumian had encountered his fair share of "enemies" who were bigger and brawnier than him. But they weren't looking to off him; they just wanted his grub, dough, and a decent spot to catch some Z's. Even if someone happened to die in the scuffle, it was chalked up to an unfortunate accident.

But now, the adversary he was up against was a monstrous creature that didn't abide by human laws or morals. And it was exponentially stronger than Lumian. Hell, it might even possess a few superpowers. If his scheme went sideways, the outcome was all but certain.

Thump, thump, thump... Lumian's heart was about to leap out of his chest.

Everyone wanted to live the good life, and Lumian was no exception.

Breathe in, breathe out... breathe in, breathe out...

Lumian tried to take deep breaths to steady his nerves, but it wasn't helping.

Lumian hoped the monster would appear sooner, though he dreaded its arrival.

On the one hand, it could bring a quick resolution to this situation, regardless of whether the outcome was positive or negative. At least then he wouldn't be as anxious as he was now, almost at the point of breaking down. On the other hand, fear gripped him tightly.

Realizing that he couldn't go on like this, he reminded himself, I can't burden Aurore with my fears. With that, he attempted to meditate, focusing all his energy on the task.

Although it proved more challenging than before, Lumian eventually managed to outline the crimson sun in his mind.

The mere sight of it eased his nerves somewhat, yet he still trembled with fear.

Suddenly, he heard a faint rustling sound.

It was as if a shepherd was approaching quietly through a nearby pasture, hidden from view.

Lumian's senses were on high alert.

He wasn't as scared as before now that things were finally happening. Despite his body still quivering, he felt more in control and less likely to collapse.

I should've died five years ago. It's all thanks to Aurore that I'm still alive. These past five years were a free lunch. What's there to be afraid of? Lumian muttered to himself, gritting his teeth and mustering up courage.

In the blink of an eye, the already dim light illuminating the first trap's surface grew even fainter.

A shadowy figure emerged, blocking the light that pierced through the dense fog in the sky.

The figure loomed in the distance, a hulking beast with blood-red eyes and greasy black hair. Half-human and half-beast, it was armed with a shotgun on its back, ready for anything. Its front "knees" bent as it surveyed the ground before it.

A moment later, the beast, wearing a dark jacket and muddy pants, removed its shotgun and jumped, controlling the vertical extent of its jump to leap over the trap and land on the solid, cracked ground.

It turned its greasy black-haired head and saw a slight movement.

Then, the monster spotted Lumian, who had a panicked expression and was trying to hide behind a wall.

With a low growl, the beast jumped up high again and pounced on its target.

It landed a slight distance away from where Lumian had been, to prevent him from turning around and dealing a fatal blow before it could stabilize itself.

Lumian fumbled his way around the wall, disappearing from view.

As soon as the monster landed, the soil beneath its feet gave way, and it plummeted

along with the dirt and rope net into a deep pit that had suddenly appeared.

Thud!

The sound of something heavy crashing to the ground echoed through the abandoned building, accompanied by a screech resembling that of a rat.

Lumian, who had concealed himself behind the wall, couldn't suppress the thrill surging through him upon witnessing the sight.

The first step had been accomplished!

With most of his fear evaporating, he seized the pitchfork by his side and dashed towards the trap.

The skinless monster's formidable tenacity had left an indelible impression on Lumian.

Moreover, his quarry had a shotgun, so he refrained from exposing himself above the deep hole. Instead, he aimed the pitchfork from a distance and thrust it into the pit.

In a sudden turn of events, the pitchfork plunged and halted abruptly.

Immediately, an intense force reverberated through the pitchfork, yanking Lumian into the trap with brute force.

Caught off guard, Lumian tumbled forward.

He didn't bother inspecting the pit's bottom. Discarding the pitchfork, he spun around and lunged towards the still-standing wall.

Bang!

The impact hit Lumian like a freight train, knocking him off his feet.

Blood, with a distinct metallic taste, surged up in his throat.

With a thud, he hit the ground, tumbling a few times before he regained his footing.

In the same instant, he caught sight of the monstrous creature—part-human, part-beast—emerging from the deep pit.

It held a single-barreled shotgun in its hand, its body torn open, revealing a grotesque display of wounds. A sickening mixture of dark red and pale yellow liquid poured out, as its insides spilled out.

Despite being badly injured by Lumian's trap, the creature had not lost its ability to fight.

As it tumbled into the pit, it managed to contort its body just enough to avoid a fatal blow. The creature's legs and arms were also still functional, allowing it to break free from the trap.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian bolted for the ruins nearby.

It wasn't a spontaneous decision; he had a plan in mind.

He knew there was a chance the trap wouldn't completely incapacitate the monster, leaving it with enough strength to fight back.

In the event that the trap failed, Lumian's contingency plan was to use the environment to his advantage. He'd play a game of cat and mouse, buying time for the beast to succumb to its wounds. Its reaction time and strength would weaken considerably, and Lumian could strike when the opportunity presented itself.

Bang!

Another shot rang out, followed by the sound of soil splattering as leads appeared at the spot where Lumian had been standing.

He quickly took cover behind a half-collapsed wall and crawled on all fours to the other side of the ruins.

Suddenly, he heard the sound of wind blowing in the air.

The monster had jumped over.

Lumian swiftly pivoted and crawled back behind the half-collapsed wall through a gap. He made the most of the special conditions of the collapsed buildings, hiding at times and circling around at others, dodging the monster's attacks without engaging in a direct fight.

Hide-and-seek was Lumian's forte, honed through past pranks where he used this innate ability to escape getting beaten up on the spot.

As the cat-and-mouse game continued, Lumian gradually found himself panting, while the monster's running speed, jumping height, strength, and reaction speed had clearly weakened.

Just a little longer, just a little longer. I still can't defeat it now... Lumian retreated back to his previous location, leaning against the half-collapsed wall and trying to control his urge to immediately counterattack.

Bang! Suddenly, he felt a massive blow to his back, sending him flying forward.

The half-collapsed wall and rocks behind him exploded into a million pieces, raining down around him as he crashed to the ground.

The monster hadn't chased after him, instead choosing to body-slam into the obstacles in its way.

The already shaky half-collapsed wall couldn't withstand the brunt of its full force and collapsed completely.

Crimson blood gushed out of the creature's wounds, pooling on the ground in a grotesque display.

Despite being caught off guard, Lumian's reflexes were quick. He rolled out of harm's way and sought cover behind a pile of rubble.

Bang!

The monster's shotgun blast missed him by a hair's breadth.

Having slammed into the wall, the monster struggled to regain its footing.

It fumbled with the cloth bag strapped to its waist, only to find it empty. With a snarl, it hurled the shotgun aside and lunged at Lumian.

Lumian had already darted to a new hiding spot for a continued game of cat-and-mouse.

Of course, he couldn't keep up this game forever. The monster might slip away if he waited too long, and the noise could attract others of its kind.

As he circled around the area, he noticed that the monster seemed to be slowing down. Here's the chance!

With a quick decision, Lumian pretended to make an escape towards a collapsed building.

Once there, he stood firm, drew his axe from his back, and took a moment to catch his breath.

In a flash, the monster rounded the corner and stood in front of Lumian.

Without hesitation, Lumian raised his axe and charged forward.

He stepped towards the creature, turning his body sideways and lowering his shoulder.

He planned to body-slam the monster, a move his sister had taught him, and then slash at its neck.

Bam!

Lumian took a step forward, leaning his body against the monster's chest, but the creature didn't budge. Lumian was surprised by its unyielding stance. He tried to push

harder, but the monster remained like a thick wall.
What... Lumian's heart tightened, and he bounced back. He was about to pounce to the ground and try to escape the monster's attack range.
In a flash, the monster lunged forward and clutched Lumian's neck in a death grip. It didn't look like it was having trouble moving at all!
Lumian gasped in shock as he was hoisted into the air, his neck throbbing with pain. Sacrebleu, I've been tricked! he exclaimed, his mind reeling.
A creaking sound filled the air, and the world spun around him, making his head swim. His axe had missed its target and was now knocked off to the side.
Lumian finally realized that he had been outsmarted by the monster.
Despite being in dire straits, the creature had enough strength to fight. It had cunningly faked weakness, luring him into attacking instead of staying hidden. Lumian had underestimated its combat intelligence, and now he found himself in a desperate situation.
The monster was clearly at the end of its rope, as evidenced by its inability to snap Lumian's neck. But this was just a temporary respite. The creature still had enough energy left to finish the job.
As his neck threatened to snap and his breathing grew more ragged, Lumian felt his mind begin to go blank.
Blank.
As Lumian teetered on the brink of death, the lady's words suddenly resurfaced in his mind.
She wanted him to use what's special about him in the dream.
Special trait... His thoughts were nearly blank, and so he quickly seized the opportunity to meditate.
The red sun instantly appeared in his mind. Unlike his previous attempt at meditation to calm his emotions, where the sun disappeared as soon as it was formed, this time he focused on keeping it in existence. Suddenly, a voice from above, infinitely high, pierced his skull.
The pain was excruciating, and Lumian felt as though his heart might burst from his chest. He forgot about the monster's vice grip on his neck and the fact that he was struggling to breathe.
Suddenly, he fell to the ground with a sickening thud.
The strange sound that had accompanied his meditation disappeared, but the pain remained, almost unbearable. He was unable to take stock of his surroundings or even assess the damage done to his body.
After an unknown amount of time, the near-death sensation subsided.
Lumian didn't bother checking his neck; instead, he placed his hands on the ground and lifted his head.
The beast was squatting nearby, half-human and half-beast, with its head drooping and its arms outstretched in front of it.
Lumian noticed its wounds still seeping with blood mixed with a yellow liquid, and the creature's body quivered uncontrollably.
What's wrong with it? Was it scared silly by the "specialness" I displayed? He picked up his fallen axe and took a step towards the monster.
Without hesitation, he held the axe with both hands and swung it at the back of the

beast's neck.

The axe sank deeply into the creature's muscles and came to a halt at its bones.

Lumian used all his strength to remove the axe, then continued his assault, slashing at the monster's neck once, twice, thrice. Finally, the beast's head detached from its body with a sickening splash, rolling to the side.

The body held on for a moment longer, barely clinging to life.

No resistance, just trembles.

And then, with a sudden jerk, Lumian's body contorted, his hands releasing their tight grip, letting the bloodied axe slide down with a sickening squelch.

Huff. Puff. Huff. He could finally catch his breath.