

Chapter 19: Sealed Artifacts

“We are guardians, but also a bunch of miserable wretches that are constantly fighting against dangers and madness.”

The corridor outside the window was sealed, its walls ice-cold. The room was illuminated with bright yellow lights. Dunn Smith’s delivery echoed, sending blow after blow to Klein’s heart. It left him temporarily at a loss for words.

Dunn shook his head and smiled when he saw Klein silent.

“Are you very disappointed? Beyonders are not like what you imagine them to be. We are always treading alongside danger.”

“There is always a price to any gain.” Klein recovered from his shock as he answered with a quivering voice.

It was true that he never imagined that the halo, abnormality, and the inordinary aspects of a Beyonder would have such hidden threats. Perhaps it was only because he was hearing a description without witnessing it first hand and that he had been sucked into the vortex with a peculiar incident already befalling him. Klein soon brought his fear, uneasiness, worry, and apprehension under control.

Of course, the thought of shrinking back was inevitable; it lingered around and refused to leave.

“Not bad. Very mature and rational...” Dunn finished the last mouthful of coffee and added, “Also, Beyonders are not as powerful as you imagine them to be, especially a low-Sequence

Beyonder. Heh, why would we use 1 to represent the highest grade and 9 the lowest? Isn't this against intuition and logic? The low Sequence we often mention refers to a low grade or a high number. They are the starting point of the Sequence chain.

"Alright, where was I? Yes, Beyonders are not as powerful as you imagine. A low-Sequence Beyonder's power is no match for guns, much less cannons. They are just more fascinating and indefensible than firearms. If you have a chance to become a Beyonder in the future, you must consider what I said today carefully. Do not make a rash decision."

Klein gave a self-deprecating smile.

"I don't even know when I will have the chance."

He felt that he would not miss the opportunity if it presented itself to him. Consuming the wrong potion or a higher-ranked potion in the Sequence could be mostly avoided. The major potential danger was the subtle influences the potions had and what he experienced from having heightened auditory and visual perceptions.

For the former, he could draw on the experiences from generations of people before him. As long as he was not in a rush to advance himself and patiently grasped control over his powers, the chances of losing control were relatively low. Furthermore, he still had to resolve the potential problem that he currently faced. He had to understand the essence of mysticism and seek a way to transmigrate back. These were the underlying reasons for taking the first step. He did not aim for higher Sequence spots. If it was easy to lose control, he could just forget about advancement, stay in his original Sequence, and rely on knowledge to plan a way 'home.'

It was needless to elaborate on the potential risks. Back when

Klein held the luck enhancement ritual, he was nearly driven crazy. The murmurings that nearly blew up his head were still fresh in his mind. They were not unavoidable by not becoming a Beyonder; therefore, it was better to gain power that allowed him to defend himself.

With this in mind, Klein felt that the pros clearly outweighed the cons. It made his thoughts of withdrawal almost disappear.

Dunn picked up his pipe again as his gray eyes carried a smiling trace to them.

“I cannot give you an accurate answer on this. To become a Beyonder, firstly, you must make enough contributions. Perhaps tomorrow or the day after, you would be able to interpret critical ancient documents. Maybe you would be able to give us valuable ideas for one of our cases? Secondly, it depends on the arrangements of the higher-ups. No one can be sure.

“Alright, I believe you should know quite a bit about Beyonders now. In the future, do not make a rash decision. Now, I’ll introduce you to our Nighthawks team’s civilian jobs.”

He stood up and walked to the door. He pointed in the opposite direction of Chanis Gate and said, “We have an accountant and someone else who is in charge of procuring necessities and collecting supplies handed out by the Church and the police department while standing in as a carriage driver. They are professionals and do not need to take shifts, so they can rest on weekends. The other three civilian staff are Rozanne, Bredt, and Old Neil. Their jobs include: attending to visitors, cleaning the rooms, and writing case files and inventory registration lists. They also guard the armory, storeroom, and the archives, strictly enforcing the registration should someone wish to enter, take out or return an item. Each of them has one day off a week, other than Sundays. They negotiate among themselves on the arrangement of night shifts and rest days.”

“So is my job scope the same as Rozanne and the rest?” Klein swept away his thoughts about Beyonders and tried to clarify his job responsibilities.

“No, there’s no need. You are a professional,” said Dunn with a smile. “You currently have two tasks. First, every morning or afternoon, go take a stroll outside. Focus on the various streets that lead from Welch’s place to yours.”

“What?” Klein was dumbfounded.

What kind of job is this?

Is that very professional?

Dunn inserted his hands into the pockets of his black trench coat and said, “After you confirm that you have lost your memories, we will close the case on Welch and Naya. Similarly, that diary of the Antigonus family has vanished completely. We suspect that you brought it with you. You might have hidden it on your way home which might be why we did not find any clues at your place. This is also likely the reason why you were not there and chose to commit suicide at home.

“Although you were mysteriously influenced and have forgotten this piece of memory, the human spirit and brain is very fascinating, so there might be residual traces. Daly might not be able to obtain them through her means as a medium, but it does not mean that they do not exist. Perhaps you will feel a sense of déjà vu at a familiar and critical spot.

“That is what we wish to obtain.”

“Got it.” Klein was enlightened.

The Nighthawks’ deduction of the diary’s location was indeed reasonable.

He was the only one alive among the people involved. Only he had the time and motive to take the diary away and hide it on his way back!

“If you can find the diary this way, you will likely make enough of a contribution to become a Beyonder,” encouraged Dunn, indirectly revealing the importance of the diary.

“I hope.” Klein nodded.

Dunn changed the subject again.

“Secondly, you get a day off every week. You can decide which day it is for now. When you are not outside, go to our armory and read the literature and canon books. This is a job for a professional historian. When you finish them all, you will have to begin taking shifts with Old Neil and the rest.”

“Alright, no problem.” Klein heaved a sigh of relief.

This is not something too difficult...

At this moment, Dunn turned his body halfway and pointed to the black outward-swinging gates that was engraved with seven sacred emblems.

“This is Chanis Gate. It is named after the creator of the modern Nighthawks system, Archbishop Chanis. There is one under the central cathedral of every major city.

“It is guarded by formal Nighthawk members on rotation. Inside, there are at least two ‘Keepers’ who are sent by the Church, as well as countless traps. You must not approach it under any circumstances; otherwise, misfortune will befall you.”

“That sounds scary,” Klein expressed his feelings.

“The area inside is divided into a few zones. Stored within are certain potion formulas for certain Sequences and other magical materials. It is also used to temporarily hold heretics, mutants, cultists, and members of secret organizations. Heh heh, they will eventually be sent to the Holy Cathedral,” introduced Dunn in passing.

Holy Cathedral? The headquarters of the Church of Evernight located in the Winter County to the north of the kingdom, Cathedral of Serenity? Klein nodded slightly as though he was pondering over the matter.

“In addition, there are all sorts of classified documents and records inside. When you gain a higher clearance, you might have a chance of reading them.” Dunn hesitated for a moment before adding, “Behind the Chanis Gate, there are also Sealed Artifacts in the basement.”

“Sealed Artifacts?” Klein ruminated on the terms.

It sounded like a specialized term.

“Some of the extraordinary items we gather and retrieve are just too important and magical. If they fall into the wrong hands, it would cause immense destruction. Therefore, we have to keep it strictly confidential and watch them carefully. Even we can only use it under special circumstances. Besides...” With that said, Dunn paused for a moment before continuing, “Besides, there are some things inside that are very special. They had certain ‘living’ characteristics which can entice the Keepers. It would influence the surroundings, attempt escape, and cause catastrophic outcomes. They have to be strictly controlled.”

“How fascinating,” commented Klein wistfully.

“The Nighthawks headquarters have categorized these Sealed Artifacts into four grades. Grade 0 represents Extremely Dangerous. They are of the highest importance and of the highest confidentiality. They are not to be inquired, disseminated, described, or spied. They can only be sealed in the basement of the Holy Cathedral,” described Dunn in detail. “Grade 1 is Highly Dangerous. They can be used in limited ways. Their security clearance is limited to diocesan bishops or Nighthawks deacons and above. The central cathedral of diocese headquarters like Backlund can store one to two artifacts. The rest will be handed over to the Holy Cathedral.

“Grade 2 is Dangerous. They can be used with care and moderation. The security clearance requires one to be a bishop or a Nighthawks team’s captain and above. The central cathedrals in the various cities can store three to five artifacts. The rest will be turned into the Holy Cathedral or the diocese headquarters. Grade 3 is Considerably Dangerous. They have to be used carefully. It can only be requested for operations that require three or more people.. The security clearance requires one to be a formal member of the Nighthawks.”

“In the future, you will see the corresponding documents. Through the numbers, you can understand what they represent. For instance, 2-125 means that it is a Dangerous grade Sealed

As Dunn went on, he suddenly turned around and returned to his room. He pulled out a piece of paper from the bottom of the drawer.

“By the way, take a look at this. Three years ago, a newly appointed archbishop lost control. For some unknown reason, he stormed through the various levels of protection and vanished mysteriously with a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. Memorize this photo. If you discover him, do not alert or disturb him. Return to report it immediately or the chance of you dying in the line of duty is a thousand percent.”

“What?” Klein received the piece of paper. There was no title on it, just a black and white photo with a few lines of words.

“Ince Zangwill. Male. Forty years old. Former archbishop. A Gatekeeper who failed in his promotion and was enticed by the devil and was corrupted. He escaped with Sealed Artifact 0-08. Particular traits are...”

The picture depicted Ince Zangwill as wearing an all-black clergyman robe with buttons on both sides and a soft cap. His hair was dark blonde and his pupils were so blue that it was nearly black. He had a high nose and his lips were tightly pursed. His facial features were like a classic sculpture without any wrinkles. The most striking characteristic was that he was blind in one eye.

“The description of the corrupted is so detailed but the only thing about the Sealed Artifact is its codename...” Klein honestly offered his first impression.

“That’s why it is at the highest security clearance. The search for

Sealed Artifacts No. 0-08 is only described verbally and never written in words. Even so, the description will be little," said Dunn with a sigh. "0-08 appears to be a common quill, but it does not need ink to write. That's all."

Dunn did not dive deeper into the topic. He tugged at the golden chain on his black trench coat and took out a gorgeous pocket watch of the same color. He clicked it open and took a glance before pointing outside.

"I've told you all you need to know. Go to the armory to find Old Neil. Get him to arrange the documents that you need to read. He is no ordinary civilian clerk. He was once a formal member, but due to his advanced age, he failed to be promoted. His health is ailing, so it's no longer suitable for him to handle cases. Furthermore, he does not wish to become an internal Keeper or rest at home. All he wishes is to be accompanied by documents and records."