

## Chapter 71: Sluggish Phenomenon

Klein repeatedly bent and extended his arm as he watched Dunn push open the Keeper's room with his body sideways.

The captain's carefulness and high alertness, as well as the ridiculous and laughable "protective actions," left him feeling abnormally tensed. The feeling was identical to what he felt when taking tests of courage that required him to walk through spooky cemeteries at night in his youth.

*A Grade 2 Sealed Artifact. Dangerous. To be used with care and moderation... It is something even a formal Nighthawk member does not know the details to... It is unknown how dangerous it is...* Amid his tense nerves, Klein found it impossible to curb himself from overthinking.

At that moment, his brain suddenly turned numb as though a power switch had been flicked off.

Everything in Klein's vision turned slow. Even his arm actions shared the same fate.

He saw Captain Dunn stop in his tracks. He came close to him as though in slow motion, extending his palm out slowly before pushing him in the shoulder.

Suddenly, Klein's thought processes and vision were restored to normal at the same time. It was as though everything from before was just an illusion.

"What happened?" he whispered amid his fright and confusion.

Dunn shook his head and said in a deep voice, “Observe carefully.”

The moment he finished his sentence, he turned around and walked into the Keeper’s room. Klein followed closely behind and saw four other people in the room; they were either seated or standing.

One of them was the Midnight Poet, Leonard. The other three were people Klein had never met before. However, all of them shared a common trait. They were all doing the extending and bending arm “exercise” with utmost seriousness.

“Klein Moretti has a miraculous connection with the Antigonus family’s notebook.” Dunn gave a brief introduction.

Then, he pointed to the other three strangers and said, “These lady and gentlemen are colleagues from the Backlund diocese. They escorted Sealed Artifact 2-049 here. This is Madam Lorotta, Sequence 8 Gravedigger. She is a master sharpshooter.”

At that moment, the black-haired woman who looked about thirty nodded at Klein in a friendly manner.

She looked pretty good. She did not wear a hat and was dressed in what appeared like male attire—a black coat with a white shirt, tight black trousers and black leather boots. The corners of her mouth were slightly curved up.

After Klein exchanged greetings, Dunn pointed to a man seated behind the desk.

“Aiur Harson, someone just like me.”

Before he finished his sentence, Klein saw Mr. Aiur Harson in his gray trench coat turn sluggish with his arm motion. It was as though a gear had lost its lubricant or a joint covered in rust.

*What's wrong...* Amid Klein's daze, he saw Lorotta push Aiur Harson. Only then did the gentleman's actions return to normal.

*Was I like that previously?* Klein was first taken aback before he came to the realization.

This indicated the dangers that Sealed Artifact 02-49 held!

*What would happen if one was not awoken in time?*

*Would one become a zombie?*

Filled with questions, Klein greeted the charming middle-aged Aiur Harson.

"Borgia," Dunn said as he pointed to the last Nighthawk.

Borgia was a cold man with a knife scar on the side of his face. His sharp brown eyes were like an eagle's. He was constantly observing everyone in the room.

"Let's set off. The faster we end this, the faster we can seal 2-049," the handsome Aiur Harson said as he stood, his eyes revealing some wrinkles.

*So, where is 2-049?* Klein surveyed his surroundings curiously but did not notice any traces of the Sealed Artifact. Of course, he

could not see the areas obscured by the table without activating his Spirit Vision.

“Alright,” Dunn turned and looked at Leonard Mitchell. “You’ll be in charge of driving. It is best not to involve Cesare with matters like this.”

Cesare was the clerk in charge of procuring and collecting supplies for the Tingen Nighthawks while standing in as a carriage driver. He was the one who drove Klein to Welch’s home to meet the Spirit Medium Daly.

“No problem.” Leonard stopped acting frivolous and nodded seriously.

At that moment, Klein saw Aiur Harson bending over. He picked up a black metal chest which had been obscured by the table.

The chest was carved with resplendent stars and the crimson full moon. It was as though there was a formless barrier around the chest.

*The Sealed Artifact should be inside there? I wonder what 2-049 looks like...* Klein observed the chest curiously.

*Thump!*

*Thump! Thump!*

Violent knocking sounds suddenly erupted from the black chest. Even the surface of the chest bulged time and time again.

*Thump! Thump! Thump!*

It was as though something horrifying had awakened within the chest and was pounding wildly. The sound of the knocking was beaten into the hearts of everyone present.

*It's alive?* Just as Klein had a thought, he saw Captain Dunn's arm exercises turning sluggish, as if his joints were layered with glue.

Borgia, the Nighthawk from Backlund, pushed Dunn's shoulder, allowing him to recover.

*It's like doing the robot dance when one is affected by 2-049... If all of us are under its influence, wouldn't we be some awkward dance squad... Luckily, 2-049 seems capable of only influencing one person at a time...* Klein lampooned to relax his tense nerves. He did not dare halt his arm exercises.

He followed Dunn's lead and left his cane behind. He then followed behind the five Nighthawks through the tunnel and up the stairs to the second floor of the Blackthorn Security Company.

Leonard had gone ahead and notified everyone in the front of the buildings, so Rozanne and the rest had all made their way to the third level. These incidents rarely involved them, but they were not completely alien to them. Another Nighthawk, Kenley, had replaced Dunn in his watch over Chanis Gate.

Klein heaved a sigh of relief when he reached the carriage. He looked suspiciously out the window and said, "Won't 2-049 affect the ordinary people on the streets?"

From their journey underground to the carriage, Sealed Artifact 2-049 had already caused six sluggish incidents, two of which were targeted at him. He had been jolted awake by Captain Dunn and Leonard Mitchell respectively. The rate of the sluggish effect was rather alarming!

“No worries, 2-049 will target humanoid creatures within five meters of it first. The closer you are to it, the easier it is for you to be chosen. As long as there are three people surrounding it, people who happen to be around when the carriage steers past will not be affected,” the beautiful, black-haired lady Lorotta explained with a lazy tone.

*What a weird Sealed Artifact...* Klein thought as he continued his arm exercises.

Dunn and the rest of the Nighthawks did not speak on the journey to Ray Bieber’s house. They were paying close attention to each other’s condition. Only Lorotta wore a nonchalant look. At times, she took in the sights of Tingen’s not-so-clean streets, and at other times, she praised Backlund’s underground water system.

Soon after, the familiar building finally entered Klein’s line of sight. The group of six made their way to the third level while observing each other.

The door to Ray Bieber’s house was labeled with the Tingen Police Department’s symbol, indicating that entry was forbidden to unauthorized personnel.

As Dunn did his stretching exercises, he took out a key. He opened the newly changed lock, then turned around, allowing Aiur Harson who was carrying the black chest to enter first.

*Thump!*

*Thump! Thump! Thump!*

The Sealed Artifact in the black chest knocked violently once again, even more violent than before. This made Aiur Harson's arm waver from side to side uncontrollably. It even made Klein suspect that the chest would be pounded open in time.

*Thump! Thump! Thump!*

Klein quickly noticed that Captain Dunn's movements were becoming sluggish. He was about to wake him up when a buzz sounded in his brain. His brain became numb, the scenes before his eyes played as though they were in slow motion.

*Didn't they say that... that it only affects one... person at a time...*  
Klein's thoughts quickly became sluggish.

At this moment, the prepared Lorotta and Borgia woke each of them up respectively by pushing them.

Having his thought processes and vision restored, Klein looked around with lingering fear. He nearly blurted out.

"Didn't you say that 2-049 can only affect one person at a time?"

*Thankfully, I did not stop my stretches!*

"When Sealed Artifact 2-049 enters its berserk mode, it can affect up to two people at once. We can confirm that Ray Bieber is

indeed a descendant of the Antigonus family,” Aiur Harson said with a mechanical tone.

Lorota let out a faint laugh. She looked at Klein and said, “2-049 becomes very agitated when it meets a descendant of the Antigonus family, even if only their scent remains. Its abilities would also increase considerably. I believe you would be able to understand its feelings.”

*Well, I don't...* Klein asked curiously, “So, is it a living creature?”

Lorotta smiled but did not reply him directly.

“You’ll know in a while. As long as Ray Bieber hasn’t escaped Tingen, 2-049 will lead us to him.”

Klein could only put his other questions on hold as he walked around the room with the Nighthawks.

Amid the loud and violent thumping from the chest, they locked the door, walked down the stairs, and returned to the carriage.

Aiur Harson looked out the window several times and confirmed that there were no pedestrians within a five-meter radius of them. He then placed the black chest on the ground and twisted the mechanical switch to release its spiritual restraints.

The violent thumping stopped suddenly, slipping the entire carriage into silence. Not even the breaths of the Nighthawks could be heard.

Klein held his breath as the black chest opened slowly. A sharp

creak that hurt his ears could be heard.

*Creak!*

The chest fell as a slender brown arm extended out of the chest. It was about the length of a child's finger.

Two arms pressed forward one after another as an object about the size a normal human being's palm appeared bit by bit in front of Klein and company.

It had clear elbow, finger, and knee joints. Covered in an oil-stained brown cloth, its face was painted with the colors of a clown—red and yellow.

It was a wooden puppet with a weird appearance!

2-049 lifted its head and looked at Klein with its pure black eyes.

Its rigid mouth slowly parted to reveal a clown-like smile.