Dinner was sumptuous.

It was a full course meal of Italian cuisine.

We started with a soup of beets—rather, a vegetable similar to beets—followed by gizzard confit.

After zeppolines13, we were served couscous with various vegetables and a lightly roasted medium-fatty Spearhead Armored Fish.

Everything was absolutely divine, but it didn’t stop there.

Savory panna cotta with prawn, battleship fish involtini14, and spaghetti with fortress crabs were added to the superb menu.

As I took a break with the mushroom risotto, the seafood soup arrived.

The soup, from which the extracts of all the seafood of the day had been extracted, was a wonderful dish that changed flavor with each sip. The soup was made by simmering various soups for more than half a day and mixing them together.

It was no exaggeration to say that this dish was made by the thoughtfulness of the chefs, and it was a hidden masterpiece that could be eaten only once a year.

And finally, the main dish of the day.

It was a veal deer fillet steak.

I cut it gently with a knife and placed it in my mouth. The tender meat melted before I could even finish biting into it.

Delicious.

Seriously, it’s so delicious!

As soon as we finished eating, Benimaru and I gave each other a high five.

There was no need to exchange words, and that was enough.

Normally, we would have a lively conversation during the meal, but everyone was quiet today. I felt that this was a sign of satisfaction.

When the white wine yogurt was served for dessert, everyone finally started to talk about their impressions.

“What is this deliciousness?! As an imperial aristocrat myself, I was proud to have tasted countless gourmet foods, but this is truly something else!!”

“I understand. Even as a prisoner of war, I always looked forward to eating here, and I’ve never felt more blissful than I do today. Thank you, Your Majesty Rimuru!”

“To be honest, if I can eat like this, I’d be happy to be Emperor.”

“I’ve also learned how to cook, but this is impossible for me. There’s nothing wasted, and the food has been thoughtfully prepared with the eater in mind.”

The Imperials were raving about it.

Dwargon’s side was not to be outdone.

“Rimuru, it seems that your cooking has improved here. Shuna-dono, was it? I’d like to invite you to my country to teach us a few recipes.”

“That’s true. I prefer drinking to eating, but this is different. The portions small enough that it makes you want to eat more. It’s all very well thought out.”

“No, I don’t think it’s calculated, but I agree that I wanted to eat more of each dish.”

“Hah! It was so delicious, I almost left for the next world.”

“What do you mean, Jaine-dono? You’re the one who’s eating everything.”

“What are you talking about, Anrietta? You’re eating the same amount of food as I am!”

“What? Even if you notice something like that, it’s good manners not to point it out!”

Basically, it seems that people were satisfied as long as the drinks are good, so I wanted to make them happy with the food as well. Thanks to Shuna and the others, I was able to achieve that goal this time.

Incidentally, Shion and Diablo were in normal operation even in such a situation.

Diablo was serving us, pouring us drinks, and Shion was standing upright as a guard.

But I know.

Shuna told me secretly that Shion was always eating and drinking in the name of poison testing. This time, she even took another bite to eat, so I didn’t have to worry that she might get hungry.

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The location changed to the common room, and we all enjoyed chatting over a cup of coffee.

While we were chatting about the food and other small talk, Gazel suddenly spoke to me.

“By the way, Rimuru, there’s something that’s been bothering me.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“It’s something you did.”

“Um…what…??”

“Benimaru-dono and the other executives there—you’re the one who made them evolve, right?”

“Ah, yes.”

Ah, that’s a sign towards being reprimanded.

I wish he’d stop saying things out of the blue like that.

I don’t think I’ll get hit, but at least give me some time to think of an excuse beforehand.

I was prepared, but Gazel smiled and continued.

Phew.

I was relieved that he didn’t seem upset.

“But explaining it to the rest of the world will be tricky, won’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

“What—you haven’t thought of that? The Western Nations, the Western Holy Church, Sarion, and the rest of the human world must have been paying attention to this war. Even if we declare the end of the war, we still need to explain the process.”

“I was just going to fake it, but…”

They wouldn’t believe me even if I explained things seriously, but as long as I shut up and didn’t say anything, nobody would know that my friends had evolved into awakened demon lords.

I thought I could get away with it as long as the deception went well.

“Well, that should be fine for the West. Blumund and others might have doubts, but the rest of the world is too peaceful. Some of them may be suspicious, but they won’t be able to stand up to Tempest, who is becoming an ally. You won’t be bullish, right?”

“In that case, there nothing wrong—”

“—However! ‘That woman’ can’t be fooled. She will definitely demand a formal explanation. What are you going to do?”

Uh, ‘that woman?’

Ah, he meant her!

“Oh, you mean El-tan15? That’s okay. I already told her.”

Elmesia-san was also worried about the war, and she and Myourmiles-kun and I had talked about it. In the worst case, she said they were considering accepting refugees.

The three of us, Myourmiles and Elmesia-san and I, had a means of emergency communication as the conspiracy trio known as the “three drunk sages.”16

It was a high-performance magic tool, compact and foldable. Put quite simply, it was a cell phone.

Inspired by Clayman’s Skill, it used long distance radio signals and geomagnetism for encrypted communication, and was capable of making long distance calls without being interrupted by magic.

However, because the materials used were all rare, the price per unit was incredibly high. Since they could not be distributed even to the executives, one could understand just how valuable these were.

With this, I was able to communicate directly with Elmesia-san. So, before the party started, I sent a message to her saying, “We won,” along with a victory report.

El-tan’s reply was, “Ok, I’m relieved. I’ll listen to you properly next time, so I’ll come over to play again, haha.” So, there was nothing for Gazel to worry about.

And yet…

“El-tan?!”

Gazel shouted at the top of his lungs.

And now he was staring at me with a look of disbelief.

Huh?

“Was there anything surprising in what I just said?”

“Don’t be stupid! How did you get so close to that Emperor?!”

Oh, that.

Well, I’m pretty good at that kind of thing.

No matter how difficult someone is, you can always start with a conversation. And the most important thing is to have a good understanding of what the other person wants to say.

In the past, when I was working as a supervisor at a construction site, there were nearby residents who always made absurd complaints. However, by listening to them calmly, the problems were able to be solved surprisingly easily.

Of course, there are also times when there is nothing one can do.

In those cases, just listening is good enough.

Always keep listening.

By doing so, the other person will feel closer to you, convinced that you can understand them, and gradually accept you.

That, or you can just bide your time and wait for the problem to be solved.

In this case, there’s no need to do anything in particular, just listen to the complaints and keep the conversation going. This makes the other person feel more intimate, and it’s overall a similar process.

In this way, what was most important in my outlook of life was the way I treated others, and the way I communicated with them.

I had felt the same way when meeting Elmesia-san, and before I knew it, we had become friends.

Could it have been the alcohol?

I’ve forgotten about that kind of thing.

Forgetting things that aren’t beneficial to you is a good way to live. Of course, it’s also very important to reflect on your mistakes so that you don’t make them again.

It’s a difficult thing to do, and I’m still learning.

“Well, how I did it is a secret, but we’re good friends now, anyway.”

I’m not stupid enough to tell him about my drunken mistakes at the bar.

That’s what I said, but it seems that Gazel was not convinced.

“Rimuru, the Emperor of Sarion is a difficult person to meet, and waiting for an audience normally takes several months. Even if I apply from Dwargon, it takes half a year. That woman has a long lifespan, so a month is like a day in her eyes…and yet you’re acting like it’s easy to contact her?!”

“Uh.”

“Yes, that’s right, Your Majesty Rimuru! Sarion is also very important to our Empire. I did not expect this level of a connection…”

Even Calgurio and the others joined in on the conversation.

When I asked them about it in detail, they told me that the Empire considered Sarion to be its greatest threat. It was speculated that they had a number of magical weapons that were yet to be seen, and that they had intended to save attacking Sarion for last.

Listening to Calgurio and Minits-san’s explanation, Gazel nodded in agreement.

Even in the Western Nations, there were many nations that recognized Sarion’s complexion, however, it was natural for them to react that way because Sarion was considered a military power that could swallow up the Western economic zone all on its own.

And the ease with which I was able to have a direct conversation with the leader of such a great power without an appointment…even if I didn’t know much about it, it really was a bit hard to believe.

But that said, it was all true.

“A-Ahahaha, well, you know, this? I guess I was lucky.”

“Hmm, it is only natural for Rimuru-sama.”

“That’s right! Rather, it is the other party who should be grateful for their luck!”

Diablo and Shion praised me from the sidelines, but I wished they would keep their mouths shut.

Seeing Gazel sigh deeply made me think it even more so.

However, Minits-san unexpectedly seemed to agree with Shion and the others.

“Well, if she saw through His Majesty Rimuru’s true value, then indeed the emperor’s reaction is understandable.”

Calgurio nodded in agreement.

“That’s right. That fearsome Celestial Empress would be able to pull off something like that without a second thought. Our empire has always thought that the country’s magical warriors would not move out. If that had been the emperor’s intention, she would have targeted our home country while Rimuru and the others were at a disadvantage. It was a close call.”

He was much more wary of Sarion than I thought he would be.

I was quite relieved that we were getting along well because I hadn’t expected Sarion to be such a dangerous country.

El-tan had invited me to come visit next time, so I would be sure to pay her a visit and learn more about things then.

“I’m sure this information was also kept secret, but how far did the Intelligence Bureau get—”

“No. Unfortunately, I hadn’t heard of this either. Well, it’s still a long time ago for me, so perhaps I just forgot.”

Velgrynd was happily denying Minits-san’s statement. She seemed to be very vindictive, and I was pretty sure she remembered everything, even if it was a long time ago.

“Oh, is there something you want to say to me?”

“N-No, it’s nothing…”

Scary, it’s like she read my mind.

This kind of person is dangerous, so I would try not to offend them.

Even so, I was shocked that they were so surprised by my connection with Elmesia-san. This was…I guess it was best to keep the fact that Myourmiles-kun was also a comrade a secret between us.

With everything from the ‘Three Drunk Sages’ going on, it would be better to be careful about letting things slip.

I made a secret vow to do so, and the night continued on.

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Calgurio and the rest of their group, in accordance with the agreed plan, began to prepare for their return.

The work was still in progress, but the construction would be handed over to Adalmann’s men. There were some who wanted to stay in the country, but they were persuaded to give priority to the stability of the empire first before thinking about immigration.

In less than a week, the preparations were completed, and they were scheduled to depart.

In this way, the remaining problems were identified, countermeasures were devised, and the status quo was confirmed.

There were no problems on the Imperial side.

We would just have to wait for word from Testarossa, taking a wait-and-see approach, until the situation changed.

If a seraph-level enemy appeared, Gazel and the others would have a difficult time.

However, the city of Dwargon, which was like a natural fortress, was equipped with multiple magical defenses. It wouldn’t be easy to break through them, so they could just contact us whenever something happened.

I had also given Gazel a cell phone, so he could use it in the case of an emergency.

And one more thing.

I decided to send Agera over to Gazel’s side.

Gazel had told me that he wanted to re-train himself.

Agera had also asked to go out for a while to calm her mind.

She said she had a lot to worry about and mull over.

Carrera had no hesitation in saying that Agera could do as she pleased.

As for me, knowing Agera’s situation, I was at a loss as to how to respond. I accepted the suggestion, thinking that time was of the essence here.

With this, even Dwargon could withstand an endurance battle.

Of course, it would be best if nothing went wrong, but if something did happen, they could still manage.

The Kingdom of Farmenas, where Youm and the others were, had also been dealt with.

Diablo sent Gadra to explain the situation. He hadn’t had a private meeting with me, so he had left two days ago.

Gadra also had a role as a guardian of the labyrinth, but there was no Demon Colossus.

There was not even a remnant of the wreckage, so we had to build it from scratch.

The researchers seemed to have rejoiced because there were some new functions they were excited to try.

It was not easy on my wallet to pay for the materials, but I asked them to make a satisfactory product since the government treasury would be paying for it this time.

Since there was still some time before the completion of the project, it was agreed that he would stay in Farmenas for the time being.

As for the Kingdom of Blumund and the Western Nations…

Cien was there, and I also sent Zonda for support. The demons are basically capable of ‘Spatial Transportation,’ so they should be able to handle most situations.

To be honest, I didn’t think it made strategic sense to target us from these locations, so I didn’t plan to take any further measures.

I didn’t think so, but if the enemy ever committed an act of human genocide, Guy wouldn’t stand for it.

He wouldn’t want the human race to perish, so he would be sure to take action.

And then there was Luminas.

If the situation was not serious enough for Guy to make a move, Luminas and the Holy Knight Order would take care of the situation.

The “Three Drunk Sages” had been informed of the situation, so Glenda and the others would be working behind the scenes. Depending on the situation, we decided that we could do something by stalling for time.

Incidentally, I had also given Glenda a cell phone.

It wasn’t for personal use, but just as a means of communication between the Three Drunk Sages and us.

Because of this phone, we could respond immediately if something happened. So it was just a matter of settling down and waiting for word from the Western Nations.

And now…

The question that remained was whether or not there would be any unintended traitors.

«Regarding that, it is probably useless to think about it—»

No, no, it’s not useless.

There is a big difference between being prepared and not being prepared in the case of an emergency.

And so, while in the office, I began to think about the things that mattered most, while looking over the reports of the damage in each area.

I told Gazel and the others to watch out for anyone who had awakened an Angelic Ultimate Skill, but…he had looked at me with a face that seemed to have lost its expression.

Then, quietly, he said—

“Listen, Rimuru. In the first place, the Ultimate Skill is a secret. It is only a tradition that mentions that one was acquired by Gran Dwargo-sama, the first Hero King of the dwarves, yet it is so important that its authenticity is unknown. Not many people know if it was true, not even Vaughn and Dolph! And yet, you…don’t talk to me like it’s just normal to have them!”

—Yeah.

In the end, I was scolded, but I was told that this was the common sense of the world.

In other words, the number of people who even knew about the existence of Ultimate Skills was extremely small. The reality is that there was currently no way to find out if anyone possessed an angelic type among them.

It was too much to worry about, so I decided to ignore it.

Or at least I did.

When I calmed down and reconsidered the situation, I realized that there were some people who were unexpectedly close to me.

At the very least, Guy and Luminas were certain to have one17.

Leon’s strength was also extraordinary, so I think he might have one as well.

I didn’t know about Dagruel, but even Dino had one, so I think it was better to assume that he had one.

Oh, speaking of Dagruel…

I recall that Luminas, from what she had heard about the future from Chloe, said that Dagruel would take advantage of the Empire to start a war. However, that didn’t seem to be the case this time.

Was there a reason for this, or was he being influenced by someone?

If it was Michael’s doing, then we could take countermeasures. I think we needed to have a proper discussion about this.

What about Milim?

Maybe it’s just that I don’t know, but I wouldn’t be surprised if there was something.

I’m sure Milim would tell me what was going on, and I’m also curious about Karion and Frey-san’s conditions. I should go and talk to them.

Just as I was thinking about all this…

Rather…this was—

I turned my gaze to my fingertips and saw a ring shining at the base of my right pinky finger. It was a ring I had forgotten I was even wearing.

It was the demon lord’s ring that I had received when I became a demon lord.

That is to say, the voice coming out belonged to Guy.

I hadn’t used it at all until now, so I must have forgotten that it had such a function.

No, this was not the time to be thinking about these things.

“Shion, go get Shuna.”

“Yes!”

I looked at Diablo as Shion ran off happily.

“It’s Guy. It seems that we’ll be holding a Walpurgis right now.”

“Oh, it’s not like Guy to do things without prior notice. It’s a bit incomprehensible that Guy personally contacted someone in the first place.”

That’s what bothered me, too.

Guy was a prideful man who was always calm in his way.

It was to the point that even his men were not allowed to talk to him…I had a bad feeling about this.

“I was told that you wanted to see me. I am here.”

“Rimuru, it’s a big deal! Something definitely must have happened if Guy actually contacted us himself!!”

Shuna entered the room, but Ramiris, who hadn’t even been called, also came along. Not only Beretta, but Treyni-san was there with her as well.

Come to think of it, she was also a demon lord, so it was only natural that Ramiris had a demon lord’s ring as well.

Ramiris told me that it was rare for Guy to organize Walpurgis.

There seemed to have been a time in the past when Ramiris, Milim, and Guy were the only three demon lords, but nothing of the sort had happened in over a thousand years.

Well, since it was all happening right now, it was definitely an emergency.

“This is what I wanted to talk about, Shuna. I don’t have time to explain in detail, but I will be taking Shion and Diablo with me to Walpurgis. Tell Benimaru to take care of things while I’m gone.”

Shuna nodded wisely as I said this.

“Understood. Good luck, Rimuru-sama!”

I nodded and got ready.

Then I waited quietly for the pickup.

Soon, the blue-haired Raine, dressed in a dark red maid’s uniform, jumped through space to reveal herself.

Ramiris had given her permission to enter the labyrinth, but her sudden appearance was still unsettling.

However, right now was not the time to worry about that.

Because Raine was covered with wounds.

At this point, I realized that my bad premonition had come true.

“Raine-chan, are you okay?”

“What the hell…?”

Ramiris and I asked in surprise, but Raine quietly shook her head.

“Don’t worry about me. I will explain everything to you once we’re all together, so please move along for now.”

I had no words to reply after hearing that.

I did as I was told, and Raine led me away.

Upon arriving at our destination, we would be confronted with new problems.