

Chapter 1

The Staccato of Marching Jackboots

We returned home on the same day that our music exchange with Luminas ended. Venom and his subordinates, as well as the band members whom they were in charge of escorting, were now all perfectly safe.

The children that Diablo protected were given a week off to rest. Thankfully, they did not sustain any injuries, but I still wanted to make sure they were safe and sound, just in case. They had witnessed firsthand the difference between training and the real deal, and as a result, lacked their usual liveliness. I was afraid they were traumatized, so I told them to have a good rest.

My conference with both Luminas and Leon was moved to a different date. After arguing over where it would be held, we finally settled on the capital of Tempest, Rimuru.

We came to this decision because Luminas’s place, Lubelius, would be busy with restoration. As for why Leon’s territory—El Dorado—was a no-go, there was apparently something serious going on over there and so they couldn’t afford to invite foreign dignitaries at the moment. In that regard, there would be no problems if we convened in Tempest, and I had no reason to decline.

After all, we already had two demon lords staying in our nation.

A certain annoying fairy and a lazy, young nobleman popped into my head.

I didn’t have time to rest yesterday, since the two of them came over as soon as they could. After Leon had returned home, he allegedly began to make immediate preparations for his visit. While I thought it was rather impatient of them, I understood that both Luminas and Leon wanted to prioritize the exchanging of important information. Besides, I wanted to hear their sides of the story about what happened. That was why I didn’t voice any complaints and instead agreed with them.

We gathered in the most luxurious reception room available. The leaders of this conference were Luminas, Leon, and I. Given that it was a conference between demon lords, I put on airs to suit the occasion.

Only those involved would take part in the meeting.

Once we collated the various details, we would determine how much information we could share regarding Chloe. Given the circumstances, there was a tacit agreement that it would be better to keep Chloe’s situation a secret from even our own subordinates.

Shion, Diablo, and Veldora were also coming with me.

Honestly, I didn’t want Veldora to attend. Since he would get bored halfway through the conference anyway, I wanted him to play quietly in his room. But for some reason, he became all adamant and asked, “And why should I not be joining?”

If you insist—I had unwillingly agreed to let him participate.

Shion was supposed to be in critical condition following her battle with Razul, but she recovered in the blink of an eye. ‘Ultraspeed Regeneration’ was indeed a very terrifying Skill.

She stood dutifully behind me, alongside Diablo. Hinata was seated next to Luminas, with Louis and Gunther shadowing them both. Positioned behind Leon, the two knights—Alrose and Claude—were also at the ready. Last but not least was Chloe, the girl of the hour. Even though she returned to her child-like form, it would be prudent to treat her as an adult.

The inside of the room was furnished with a rectangular table, along with six individual armchairs that we had provided. Veldora and I sat side by side, directly facing Hinata and Luminas. Leon and Chloe, on the contrary, were seated at the ends of the table, opposite each other.

With that, the interim demon lord meeting had begun.

First, we asked Chloe to personally explain to us what had happened. As she delved into her story, Hinata interjected here and there, adding her own clarifications for what had occurred. Naturally, what they shared was impossible to believe. However, having experienced that imaginary landscape firsthand, I could more readily accept their testimony.

“—So, with the help of Hinata and Rimuru-san, I was able to safely free myself from the ‘Infinite Loop,’” Chloe declared, marking the end to her almost inconceivable explanation.

Everyone looked like they had something to say, but kept quiet, glancing around as they tried to gauge each other’s reactions. In such an uneasy situation, Veldora was the one who broke the ice, mainly because he couldn’t read the mood at all.

“Which means the Hero who sealed me away was—”

That doesn’t matter at all, does it? I thought quietly to myself, but Hinata already had a response waiting.

“Me. Now we’re tied with one win and one loss. Don’t you think it’s good to have tasted defeat?”

“Wha-WHAAAT?!”

“Ara, do you have a problem with that? If you want, we can settle this once and for all.”

“Grrr, very well! Since you insist, allow me to show you my true strength and—”

Our meeting would go nowhere if this continued. Hinata was usually levelheaded, but strangely enough, she was being immature towards Veldora.

I decided to be the mediator for this one.

“All right, that’s enough.”

Please discuss your differences when you two are alone.

“Hinata, it is very important to teach that moronic dragon some manners. If you are going to fight him, then I’ll join you, so don’t be afraid to call me at any time.”

Please don’t make things worse, Luminas-san.

And so, I hurriedly changed the subject. “Come now, everything turned out fine. By the way, I’ve been thinking about this for a bit, but I was apparently killed, right? I wonder if the culprit came from the Empire.”

This was an important issue to me.

Even now, the Empire’s movements remained suspicious. We needed to stay vigilant due to their potential hostility.

Chloe voiced her support. “Yeah, probably. I also think that it was the same person who killed Hinata. It seems like there are powerful individuals in the Empire, and although there’s also the possibility that you were challenged by several people at once, the flash of light that pierced through Hinata was something I couldn’t even follow.”

I see. If this person could kill Hinata, then including me on their hit list wouldn’t sound too far-fetched because I never became a demon lord in that timeline.

“Despite the fact that I’ve evolved into a demon lord now, it’s still better not to let my guard down.”

Even though it was a completely different timeline, I felt serious aversion to the person that had killed me. We definitely needed to exercise caution when it came to antagonizing the Empire.

“I agree. The Empire is a lot more dangerous than what you think, Rimuru-san. After you died, Veldora went on a rampage, but the Empire was still able to fend him off.”

While fighting Veldora, Hinata was murdered, and Chloe leaped into the past. Afterwards, Chronoa could only remember certain things from her fragmented memory.

Still, there was no doubt that the Empire used the clash between the rampaging Veldora and Chronoa to their advantage. Given that we had witnessed firsthand the power of Chronoa, just being able to intervene in such a battle was a feat in itself. And if that was the case, then the Empire’s strength was definitely greater than what we expected.

Luminas and Leon looked like they had the same idea. Everyone had a growing sense of urgency regarding the Empire.

Of course, in this somber atmosphere, Veldora just had to blurt out his off-topic opinion. “Me going on a rampage? I find that hard to believe,” he asserted, a smug look on his face.

Everybody’s reaction to that outburst could be summed up with “What is this guy even saying?”



Veldora’s impressive ability to joke around like that in such a heavy atmosphere was quite—

“Wait! Why are you all looking at me like that?! There’s no way a gentleman such as I would go out of control like that!”

Well, you see… Given that he used to run amok in the olden days, it was easy for anyone to imagine that he had let his emotions get the better of him and gone on a rampage. Then again, watching my death moments before his revival might’ve set off his wrath, or something like that. When I thought about it that way, I couldn’t help but feel a little happy.

“Come on, let bygones be bygones.”

So, I decided to appease Veldora with a bit of warmth in my voice.

The Empire is dangerous—we ended the discussion with that conclusion.

Next, we analyzed Chronoa’s memories by having Chloe recall as far back as possible.

After Veldora was defeated by the Empire, the world entered a tumultuous period of conflict. In the war involving the West and the East, it was the Empire who possessed the upper hand.

Milim made her move in the midst of all this. My death set off her wrath against the Empire. However, before she could cause any meaningful damage against them, Guy intervened. As a result, history wound up repeating itself—a devastating battle between Milim and Guy.

Dagruel and Luminas also clashed with each other, adding fuel to the fire, their armed conflict bringing even more destruction to the world.

And Chronoa fought someone and ultimately died in the process. She had rushed to wherever there was battle and fought for as long as her life still lasted. All she had left was a lust for destruction, indiscriminately taking down powerful people, friend or foe.

So that’s why she couldn’t remember who killed her…

“The number of individuals capable of defeating someone as strong as Chronoa is certainly limited, right?”

“It’s Guy.”

“I can only think of Guy.”

Luminas and Leon immediately responded to my mumbling.

I thought so, too. Despite the outcome of the duel between Guy and Milim being unclear, the only person who could kill Chronoa was him. Be that as it may, we didn’t know the exact reason as to why Guy would kill Chronoa, so it might not have been him.

“So, why is Chronoa so fond of me?”

Judging by Chloe’s story thus far, I didn’t think I had any connection with Chronoa. She was revived after my death, so we never encountered one another. And yet, no matter how you looked at it, Chronoa obviously adored me. I wasn’t that dense to have missed the obvious signs.

She was already like that the first time we met, now that I think about it. When I had unwittingly summoned her to stabilize Chloe, the moment she laid her eyes on me, she hugged and kissed me. I was a little bit shocked because I thought that it was our first time meeting each other, but I surmised there was a pretext to her behavior.

“That’s because—”

‹Because Rimuru helped me. You were definitely the one who saved me in that future, where all I did was rampage.› Chronoa took over Chloe’s story.

“Hey, I was about to explain it to them!”

‹It’s fine, let me continue. After all, I’m also you, so aren’t we in this together?›

From a bystander’s point of view, Chloe acted like she had multiple personalities. Chronoa could apparently interject herself into the conversation as long as Chloe wasn’t actively suppressing her.

It was something we just had to get used to.

And so, Chloe and Chronoa swapped back and forth as they told their story. Based on Chloe’s—I mean Chronoa’s—memory, I wasn’t dead in the future. It was indisputably the Empire that had defeated me, but by all accounts, I had somehow revived afterwards.

Fair enough… If I survived, then that meant ‘Great Sage,’ the predecessor of Raphael-san, was alive too. It appeared to have taken some time, but in the end, it also managed to pull through.

Unfortunately, the world had seen dramatic changes. A great war erupted between the East and the West, and a fierce power struggle arose among the demon lords.

Hmm, it’s not hard to imagine what I would be feeling then. After all, it was still me. There was no doubt in my mind that I would have desperately tried to find friends who had managed to stay alive. Saving everyone was an impossible task but helping those I had a connection with was definitely feasible. And through that, I found Chloe (Chronoa).

The crucial parts of Chronoa’s fragmented memory were, regrettably, what she could not remember clearly. Despite the setback, we could still perceive the flow of events, albeit vaguely. I evidently met Chronoa and ended up fighting her countless times. And with my earnest efforts, she would’ve eventually returned to her normal self.

Nevertheless, what the world endured was simply irreparable.

‹As we all expected, I indeed fought Guy. I don’t know how or why it happened, but the one thing I’m certain of is that Rimuru was already gone at that point. Yet, Rimuru had hugged me while I was dying. After I finally passed on, I recovered my consciousness and saw myself (Chloe) and the previous Rimuru together.›

I wasn’t surprised about Guy fighting her.

More importantly, the strange thing that occurred just before Chronoa was about to die…was probably her ‘Time Travel’ activating. But that in itself was not enough to explain how she arrived at Chloe’s timeline. Perhaps I did something to make that transpire.

“When you saw me, had I evolved into a demon lord yet?”

‹You had. The Rimuru I met then was stronger compared to the current Rimuru.›

Oh, you can tell that just by looking?

I was under the belief that I was pretty strong at the moment, but I doubt Chronoa would misjudge someone’s strength. If that was true, then I could only infer that losing the people I knew spurred me on to do something crazy. Honestly, all of this was irrelevant to me now anyway; then again, there was also the issue of the Empire. Rather than stressing over it, we should view the situation in a positive light: an opportunity to motivate everyone and get them stronger.

Well, let’s just keep it at that. Besides, if that alternate Rimuru was stronger than me, then surely ‘Great Sage’ had also evolved into ‘Wisdom King Raphael.’ If so, then it wouldn’t have been too far-fetched if it did something unthinkable like sending Chronoa’s spirit and memories to the young Chloe.

«……»

Fufufu, even you can’t deny the possibility.

With that, we tentatively cleared up the presumed future chain of events.

“I guess everything turned out fine,” I said, nonchalant.

Hinata gave me a sidelong glare. “Aren’t you taking this a bit lightly?”

“Don’t say that. Chloe is safe now, and Veldora’s already been revived. As long as we keep an eye on the two, we don’t have to worry about them going out of control. Therefore, isn’t the only problem we have to deal with the Empire?” I answered with a bright smile.

“That’s right. If Dagruel ever attacks, I will take care of it. This is my repayment to you for helping Chloe.”

Luminas and Chloe seemed really close, and because I had saved Chloe, my stocks with her reached an all-time high 4 . Thanks to that, it appeared Luminas and I would be able to maintain a better relationship than ever before.

One of our main concerns involved Dagruel’s treachery. Thankfully, Luminas vowed to take care of it for us. She even promised to protect the West without me needing to ask. The Western Nations had always, by nature, been Luminas’s domain. Even though some of the regions had disputes with Guy, he only saw their interaction as nothing more than a game. Luminas apparently came to the conclusion that there was no use fretting over it. The bigger problem was Dagruel. Obviously, we were wary of the fact that he would become hostile one day.

“He is going to join the upcoming war,” Luminas declared, “so there is a high possibility that he will take advantage of it when the Empire ultimately moves.”

I was still skeptical. “But Dagruel’s sons are currently living in this country, you know? I don’t think he would use military force against us that easily.”

In my opinion, there had to be a reason for Dagruel’s actions.

“Huh? Did you say Dagruel’s sons? Are you sure?”

“Yup. They’re Shion’s subordinates now and have been working hard on their training.”

In response to my words, Shion crisply remarked: “Yes, that is true. Although they still have a long way to go, they’ve recently shown good results in their training. And when I treat them to my home-cooked meals as a reward, they cry tears of joy. They are such a cute lot.”

“Cry tears of joy” sounds rather dubious to me. While eating food cooked by the woman you loved would certainly leave you happy…that entire premise depended on the food being edible. Actually, as long as you tolerated the look and texture, you could technically eat Shion’s cooking. Well, I reckon it was fine to leave them to their own devices. If the people themselves didn’t complain, then I had no reason to interfere.

Luminas looked astounded upon hearing that Dagruel’s sons were in my nation. That said, she regained her composure within a matter of seconds.

“Sounds like it’s true. Then, someone has manipulated Dagruel—no, it sounds weird if I say it that way since it’s something that has taken place in the future. I suppose we can say someone might manipulate him,” Luminas stated after careful consideration.

A war had broken out in the future, but we were at peace right now.

There must be a reason behind Dagruel harboring such territorial ambition. When I had met him during Walpurgis, I never got the impression that he was a bad person. I figured I should ask Dagura and the other two sons for a possible explanation. If he were experiencing any problems, we could lend a helping hand by offering advice. And if it could be solved through diplomacy, then it was a much better solution compared to armed conflict.

“We will also look into the matter on my side.”

“All right, I shall entrust that to you. I do not wish to engage in some unreasonable battle, after all.”

We still had time to spare for the results of our investigation regarding Dagruel. Luminas would also be on the lookout, just in case, as it would be troublesome if Dagruel truly did conspire with the Empire.

Louis and Gunther nodded together, implying that we could trust them to stay vigilant.

“Next up is the situation with Guy…” I began.

“I’ll tell him,” Leon volunteered.

It was useless if we complained to Guy since this whole ordeal took place in the future. On the other hand, our worries weren’t exactly assuaged, either; a better plan would be to explain the circumstances to Guy instead. However, I wasn’t sure how much information we could actually disclose…

“Guy is a ‘Mediator.’ Although it has nothing to do with me now, I feel like he may or may not have destroyed me a long time ago. I can’t really remember it clearly, so it doesn’t count,” Veldora suddenly confessed.

I didn’t know where to start, what to do, or how to go about it. What did Guy being a Mediator even mean? This was also the first time I’d heard about a fight between Guy and Veldora long ago, where Veldora was annihilated.

By the way, I thought that saying something along the lines of “I can’t remember it, so I still did not lose” was a petty excuse that children used. But that was a bit mean, so I decided not to comment.

“Ho, Guy sure does some nice things,” remarked Luminas.

“Mediator, huh? Guy is not an ally of humanity, but he is undeniably not an enemy either. It’s safe to assume the reason why he killed Chronoa in that future was because he feared the idea that if she, the ‘lust for destruction’ incarnate, were to be left unchecked, it would lead to the collapse of the world,” Leon concluded.

“What the heck is a ‘Mediator’ anyway?”

Everyone else had already grasped the situation. I asked the question outright, and Luminas was the one who explained it to me.

“A Mediator is a system that exists separately from Heroes and demon lords. It is said that a Mediator’s goal is to prevent the destruction of the world and to be the spokesperson of its creator, Star King Dragon Veldanava.”

“That’s right. My older brother, the Star King Dragon Veldanava, established that system to prevent the world he worked hard to create from collapsing.”

I see. That would explain why Veldora was punished; in order to prevent him from destroying the world.

It made a lot of sense to me. Also, as a result of Veldora’s story, I was able to confirm that True Dragons could resurrect. I still doubted whether he really lost his memory about that incident, but let’s not point that out.

“Got it. So, Guy’s unlikely to go after Chloe now.”

“Yeah. I also recall Chronoa rampaging, and I think what Demon Lord Guy did was reasonable, so I don’t plan to hold any grudges against him.”

Hinata and Chloe seemed rather convinced and had spoken with smiles on their faces. We could avoid a fight with Guy as long as we nipped potential causes for violence in the bud.

“If that’s the case, can we permit Leon to explain this matter to Guy?” I proposed.

“Of course. After all, the future of me and Chloe is at stake here,” Leon stated with firm conviction.

“Leon-oniichan,” Chloe quickly pointed out, “has nothing to do with this.”

Such innocence was quite scary. I felt a bit of sympathy for Leon.

While Leon was very handsome and cool, the world apparently universally recognized him as a villain. As was the case with Shizu-san, Leon seemed to be a poor talker and was haunted by a guise of evil. Maybe that was why he was so easily misunderstood. In layman’s terms, he was the polar opposite of Masayuki.

Chloe treated him like the friendly neighborhood onii-chan. Not even a shred of romantic interest existed in her mind. Leon appeared to have been a popular man for a long time, but that might be the reason why Chloe was completely unaware of the affection he showed her.

When I thought about it, he was also a pitiful man. And so, I came to the conclusion that I should be a little kinder towards him.

The two demon lords promising their cooperation was proof in itself that this conference was a resounding success.

Thus, the only thing left to be wary of was the Empire. We still needed to come up with our own plans after the meeting, so when I was about to formally declare the end of our discussion—

“P-please wait! We have guests right now, and they are in the middle of an important meeting!”

“Oh, I’m amazed you noticed me coming. But, you see, I made the effort to come all the way here, so let me just say hi.”

—A commotion could be heard from the corridor.

I mean, this voice and the arrogant attitude from that conversation just now could only mean one thing…

The person right outside the room was unmistakably the strongest demon lord, Guy. I could count the number of people who were able to slip under my radar—an impressive feat, might I add—on one hand.

«Report. No hostility detected.»

…Don’t tell me you noticed him?

But now was not the time to argue. I hurriedly got up from my seat. But before I could move any further, Diablo, who was standing behind me, headed to the door with a sour look on his face.

“Yo!”

“Go home.”

Following that brief exchange, Diablo slammed the door shut with a bang.

“ “ “……” ” ”

We were all frozen in shock at the incredible spectacle before us.

The door reopened and Guy stormed in, yelling, “Hey, hey, come on now, Diablo!”

“Tsk, you’re interrupting this important meeting. It hasn’t even been a day yet, which is why I’m still unprepared. I want to take my time speaking with you, so please don’t come here until I invite you.”

Despite Diablo’s polite words, his attitude towards the one he was addressing, Guy, sure was self-assertive.

Or perhaps they know each other? I wasn’t the only one who had the same thought. Even Luminas and Leon were surprised.

“Unbelievable. He didn’t budge an inch against Guy. As expected of Noir.”

“Noir, you say?! Why is somebody like him working under Rimuru?”

Hmmm?!

Listening in, there was something rather disconcerting about the words being spoken around me.

Is Diablo that significant of a figure? Well, I guess he’s got a cocky attitude… Seriously, what does ‘Noir’ even mean?

While I was standing there, utterly bewildered, more disturbances arrived. The first to come running here was Benimaru, followed by Souei, hot on his heels. Next was Carrera, and almost at the same exact time, Ultima burst into the room, too.

“Rimuru-sama, are you all right?!” Benimaru pressed. “Just now, my sister told me—”

“Milord,” Carrera said urgently, “I felt the presence of Red!”

“Has the war started? If so, I will do my best!” Ultima promised.

It was pandemonium.

Given the circumstances, it would be a better idea to receive Guy as a guest than to drive him away. I had no intentions of inviting Guy here to begin with. I’d have to wring out Diablo later to find out what the deal is.

But for now, the first priority was to get this place in order.

“Guys, calm down. Diablo, control yourself.”

My words quieted the people who had just barged in.

Once everyone in the room collected themselves, I continued. “Although this wasn’t planned, we do have something to talk about with you, Guy. Since you’ve come all the way here, I’m going to ask you to join our meeting. Is that all right?” I checked with Guy.

“Yeah. I also need to discuss something with you, so this is good timing.”

Leon was supposed to explain everything to Guy, but it looks like there was a change of plans. And so, with Guy’s attendance confirmed, I decided to dismiss the people that had assembled.

“Don’t worry. I’ll call if something happens, so for now, you guys can get back to work.”

When I said that, everyone had a look of relief.

I had to do a double take when I heard certain people spout lines like: “Phew, as expected of ‘Red.’ I’m still no match for him now, huh?” or “Tsk, I thought this was my opportunity to go all out,” but in the end, the situation was somehow brought under control.

Everyone that had gathered returned to their respective jobs. Then, Shuna left the room to prepare tea for those who remained in the room.

Immediately after her departure, Leon spoke up.

“Hey, what’s the meaning of this? Why is Jaune here?!”

Hm?

“I have a question, too. Isn’t that other person Violet, or is it just my imagination? I’m not sure because, from what I have heard, she allegedly has a more gloomy and malicious personality…”

Hmmm? What are these guys blathering about with this Jaune and Violet thing? Ah, maybe…!

“Did you mean Carrera and Ultima? They were recruited by Diablo over there, and they’ve been better than I expected—” I tried to explain, but was unable to finish my sentence.

“Carrera? And Ultima?! You…you’ve given them names!!”

“I can’t believe it. So what you are saying is you not only have Diablo, but other primordials attending you as well…”

Leon had suddenly stood up and yelled at me, whereas Luminas looked genuinely astonished. Their sharp gazes pierced right through me.

“See, you’re flabbergasted too. This is also the reason why I came here—to ask this guy about his real motive.”

Even Guy blurted something out of left field.

I’d like to answer you, but I don’t really know what to say, okay?

While I was puzzling over how to respond, Shuna entered, pushing a tea cart. We became quiet so we wouldn’t hinder her work. A pleasant smell wafted through the air and brought a sense of calm to everyone’s mind.

It also helped keep my wits about me as I tried to piece together what these guys were saying. The keyword was “primordial,” which Luminas had just mentioned. And by primordial—

«Answer. One of the criteria for classifying a demon.»

Right, I remember, you explained it to me before. If I’m not mistaken, the original demons are called “primordials.” Wait, the original demons—?!

“Diablo, are you, by some chance, one of the original demons?”

Upon asking Diablo, he casually replied, “Well, yes. Indeed, I am the progenitor of one of the seven original lineages to the demon race born in this world.”

Oi oi, are you serious?

I couldn’t believe the demon I had summoned when I was about to evolve into a demon lord was such a prominent figure… I knew he was very strong, yet evidently, he was even more dangerous than I’d anticipated.

“…No way, don’t tell me you didn’t know?”

“Unbelievable. I thought you were careless, but I never expected you to be clueless…”

Leon and Luminas’s stares hurt.

After all, it couldn’t be helped, right? How was I supposed to know he was that big of a deal if he answered a random summoning of mine?

«……»

Even Raphael-san was speechless. Although, that reaction wasn’t directed towards Diablo’s true identity, but rather at my ignorance. It was under the impression that I already knew about the primordial demons.

—No, wait a sec.

Come to think of it, I felt that Elmesia, the empress of Sarion, had mentioned the primordials before. That would explain why she was so wary of Diablo—she already knew his true identity!

Had I been more attentive, I would’ve noticed Diablo’s real character much earlier.

Well, this was what you called…making assumptions.

I never dug any deeper nor did I try to bring it up. For Raphael-san, it merely decided that there was no need to inform me. This was a major pitfall. For example, if you had a dictionary on hand, it would be worthless if you didn’t use it. Raphael-san had recently been giving me advice, but even it wasn’t omnipotent. There was no way it could figure out what I did and didn’t know.

No matter how brilliant your partner was, if you didn’t fully utilize it, then it was useless. Never had this been more true.

Putting aside my surprise, Diablo began to share how he met me.

Apparently, it went back to my encounter with Shizu-san. There seemed to be a connection between Diablo and Shizu-san 5 , and when he sensed that she was about to die, he happened to visit this place.

It was a surprise that Diablo already had his eyes on us back then, but I had no clue regarding his intention for doing so.

“A low-ranking demon from my lineage stole my position in line and ended up getting summoned by Rimuru-sama instead; that was the height of my sorrow. However! I stayed calm and waited for another opportunity, and splendidly enough, I was able to successfully respond to Rimuru-sama’s summoning!” Diablo finished, grinning from ear to ear.

Then, Diablo responding to the summoning wasn’t pure luck, but rather inevitable since he was already aiming for it in the first place?

I was so taken aback that my head started to hurt.

Also, this was news to me, but Diablo was evidently jealous of Beretta and tried to purge him behind my back. Despite that, he mentioned how he couldn’t hurt Beretta because it would’ve been sacrilegious to damage the body I had created for him.

“This body is handmade by Rimuru-sama,” warned Beretta, “so if you lay a finger on it, you will incur his displeasure.”

I was dumbfounded, to say the least.

But honestly, Diablo’s story was excessively long. The thought that someone should go and stop him occurred to me, yet Diablo’s fervor was too great for anyone to interfere.

There was no other option. I had to bite the bullet.

“Diablo, Diablo-kun! That’s enough. The meeting is about to start again.”

Following my lead, Guy spoke next.

“You’re already satisfied, aren’t you? More importantly, that guy Dino is also here, right? Can you call him over for me?”

Prompted by Guy’s words, Diablo’s endless chatter had finally come to an end.

“Well then, I shall summon Dino-sama.” Shuna, who had sadly missed her window to escape from this torment, left with a polite bow.

She ran away—the fact that I thought of Shuna this way was proof that I was at my wit’s end.

“But I’m just about to reach the good part!”

While Diablo obviously still had a lot more to say, everyone shared the same sentiment and simply ignored him.

I didn’t know what he might even begin to reveal if we heard any more of his story. Also, it was better for Diablo to keep his mouth shut for the sake of my own peace of mind.

Guy’s seat had apparently been set up in the midst of the uproar. It was a guest armchair brought in by Leon’s subordinates from an adjacent waiting room.

“Oh, how thoughtful of you.”

Guy’s words were answered by Leon’s subordinate knights, Alrose and Claude, with a light bow. The two were apparently already acquainted with Guy. Otherwise, neither of them would’ve dared to engage in such reckless behavior, given that this was Guy we were talking about here.

I should’ve prepared his seat, considering he was my guest, but with what just took place, I didn’t have enough time to pay attention to these kinds of matters. I might’ve offended Guy if I hadn’t offered him something, so I was grateful those two guys were here.

The secretary who was supposed to assist me was, well, too engrossed in his storytelling. And my other so-called secretary, Shion, never left my side, like it wasn’t part of her job responsibility.

“Sorry about that,” I apologized.

“No, don’t worry about it!”

“We are also aware of Your Majesty Rimuru’s circumstances. Aren’t you keeping people away from this room so we could be at ease? If so, then this was the least we could do.”

These two, Alrose and Claude, were really nice people. Diablo and Shion should take notes from them.

“Listen, you guys have to be attentive like that.”

“Kufufufufu, I spoke a little too passionately.”

While Diablo appeared to have wanted to pin the blame on Guy for dropping by unexpectedly, he normally wouldn’t have made such a blunder. But I guess this was just bad timing.

“Yes, this was a good learning experience!”

Shion was rather upfront.

This girl’s only good at talking the talk.

I silently prayed that this incident would contribute to their development.

Guy plonked down on the armchair, exuding his cavalier attitude. At the same time, Shuna returned with Dino in tow. For some reason, Ramiris also came along, and, putting all the things that had just happened aside, the meeting resumed once again.

The first topic of discussion was about the primordial demons.

“Then, Dino. Let me hear your excuse.”

“Er, what excuse?” Dino naturally responded to Guy’s inquiry. However, his attitude struck a nerve with Guy.

“Don’t fuck with me! Why didn’t you stop this guy from naming those three?!”

He’s got a point. That is important, you know?

It seemed that “this guy” referred to me, but if I’m being honest, I wouldn’t have entertained the thought of naming them, had I known how dangerous they truly were.

Although it was too late now, he should’ve at least warned me.

“Listen, what the hell do you think I sent you here for?”

“Uhm, sightseeing?”

“Wrooong! For reconnaissance, reconnaissance!”

Looking at their exchange, I thought Guy was rather hot under the collar. While I had already suspected as much, Dino was now definitely confirmed to have been a spy. But really, I wished Guy hadn’t openly outed him as a spy to the face of the very person being spied on.

“And you, too! Don’t make that innocent expression as if you had nothing to do with this!”

Uh oh, I got dragged into this as well. The fact that I was being scolded by the same people who decided to commit espionage against me was outrageous. On the other hand, I was certainly the cause for such behavior. I wanted to complain, but it’d be unwise to gripe without thinking things through.

This was Guy we were talking about here; provoking him was definitely not a good idea.

“Gah-hahaha! Don’t fret over little things, Guy. This isn’t the first time he’s granted names willy nilly,” Veldora-san unexpectedly backed me up.

Keep at it! I cheered in my mind.

“Shut up!” Luminas shouted. “Don’t interrupt when the adults are in the middle of a conversation!”

“O-okay.”

Veldora fell silent after that harsh rebuke. His inability to talk back demonstrated how wimpy he really was.

Well, thanks to Veldora’s sacrifice, their finger-pointing had shifted away from my direction. I didn’t want to blow this opportunity, so I started to needle Guy with my grievances.

“Okay, okay. The reason Dino came here was to keep an eye on me, right? I’ll put aside my complaint about that for the time being, and while Dino is at fault for not stopping me, shouldn’t the person who entrusted Dino with this job and sent him to my place also be held liable for poor supervision? Don’t you think so, Guy-san?”

This was, in other words, sharing responsibility. It’d be no fair if I were the only one being criticized here, so my plan was to ensure Dino and Guy got their fair share.

Dino’s involvement was already clear, so all I needed was Guy’s confession.

“That’s right, Guy. Basically, I can’t do surveillance stuff for the life of me. It’s frankly surprising that you thought of making me work.”

Dino appeared a lot more perceptive in this kind of situation given how he caught on to my plot.

Guy looked frustrated. “You bastards…”

We had to find a way to settle this quickly, all the while being careful not to provoke him any further.

“First and foremost, I didn’t have time to stop him,” Dino said. “When I saw Rimuru with the primordials, I was totally baffled, speechless. After all, there’s three of ‘em, y’know? I accepted the matter with Diablo because he’s always been an oddball, but the idea that someone like Testarossa, along with those other two, would willingly serve another person was something I couldn’t even begin to imagine!”

“I guess so.”

Oh, Dino is trying to shirk responsibility with his remark, and Guy is agreeing with him. This was a bad development.

“Me too!” I added “I wholeheartedly believed Diablo when he brought them here and promised that they would be helpful, and so I welcomed them. I never thought that they would turn out to be such big shots, since everyone was very polite about agreeing to work for me. They’re under Diablo’s direct control, and he’s the one responsible for them. If anything happens, I’ll also be held accountable, but it’s only natural to trust your subordinates, right?”

Trying to come up with a good excuse, I redirected the blame towards Diablo. When you got down to the crux of the matter, Diablo was the root cause of all this trouble. That much was certain.

I glanced at Diablo, giving him a hint that he should do his best to take on Guy’s anger. When I did, for some reason, Diablo nodded happily after hearing my remark.

“Kufufufufu, Rimuru-sama’s faith and his words fill me with joy. I will have to work harder to live up to his expectations!”

“…”

Guy wearily fell silent after witnessing Diablo’s radiant smile. Then, he let himself lean back in his seat.

“In other words, it’s Diablo’s fault?” Guy asked with disdain.

“He’s at fault, and…”

“We are the victims, yeah?”

When I faltered with my explanation, Dino awkwardly finished the sentence.

Diablo was the only person that had confidence in his response.

“This guy’s been weird since the olden days, so there’s no use complaining now,” Guy commented, pointing to Diablo.

“Dino, you weren’t able to stop Rimuru. This, too, is understandable given the situation.”

Oi oi? I don’t like where this is going.

“Well. Rimuru, it’s you!”

I knew it! Why are you pointing the finger at me now?!

“What do you mean?”

I shouldn’t panic here. I had to face Guy with a sense of self-assurance, coupled with an attitude that showed I hadn’t done anything wrong. With that in mind, I relinquished control of my body to Raphael-san so that he wouldn’t notice my agitation.

I felt relieved. Regardless of how turbulent my thoughts were right now, I appeared calm on the outside.

“Don’t fucking make excuses!”

Following that outburst, Guy then scolded me aplenty.

He mentioned quite some serious stuff, like how the delicate balance of power in the world had completely collapsed as a result of my actions. Consequently, the changes to the current state of world affairs were unclear, among other things. Transferring control over to Raphael-san had been a useless attempt.

Guy seemed a lot more calculating than I’d thought.

“Also, because of you, Mizeri’s plan failed. You gonna be taking responsibility for that too, y’know?”

Guy finished his sermon on that note.

While it was ridiculous to accept responsibility for something I didn’t even know about, if Guy was willing to overlook my behavior, then it was a small price to pay. I nodded and agreed to his demand, for the time being, and got through this precarious situation.

Even though the sermon was over, Guy continued with his story.

He claimed to be causing disasters regularly to remind humans who the common enemy of mankind was. The purpose, ostensibly, was to make people fear the existence of a powerful entity, so that they wouldn’t spend all of their time engaging in pointless power struggles among themselves.

When Granbell had been in charge, his approach was to wait and see how things would go and refrained from taking any bold actions. But this time, Granbell’s war against Luminas had upset the balance.

Thus, Guy had ordered Mizeri to unite humanity with fear.

With the deaths of the elected councilors, the leaders of the member nations within the council would reaffirm the threat of the demon lords. And by making that happen, the leaders of the Western Nations would join forces—that was the scheme Mizeri had devised.

“Then, for some reason, White—Testarossa—was present in the assembly hall where Mizeri attacked. Tsk, I’m so used to calling you by your old name, I said it by accident,” Guy grumbled under his breath, then resumed recounting his experience.

“Mizeri abandoned her plan to avoid clashing with Testarossa. That was fine. The problem is, what comes next? As soon as we are unable to control those devious humans, they will start skirmishing. Moreover, now that the Rosso family has collapsed, the power struggles will undeniably intensify—it’s just a fact of life. And with that tomfoolery of the Western Nations in the midst of the Eastern Empire’s suspicious movements, their defeat is all but certain. This is your fault, Rimuru. Tell me, what are you going to do?”

This was unexpected. I didn’t know Guy’s goal was ultimately to prevent the dissolution of the Western Nations.

He didn’t seem particularly interested in humans, but he still might be concerned about them perishing. I mean, it did sound like the duty of the Mediator.

I didn’t think he was on the side of humanity, and that his methods were rather extreme; nonetheless, I felt that we could understand each other, depending on the way we did things. Therefore, the current point of contention was how to deal with the Western Nations, which I intended to sort out.

I didn’t even know that Testarossa and Mizeri had encountered each other, but I couldn’t use that as an excuse. I just wanted humanity to recognize our existence as monsters and build friendly relations with them.

As I was wondering how to answer Guy, Diablo stepped forward. Ignoring Guy’s slightly uncomfortable expression, he began to speak.

“Heh, we don’t have to do anything unnecessary; we only need to help realize Rimuru-sama’s ideals.”

Although I was anxious of what he might say, it wasn’t like I had a better alternative. Arguments about ideals wouldn’t work on Guy, so I wagered on Diablo’s confident attitude, but it appeared to be a failure.

Diablo, to my surprise, started preaching about idealism, which I had dismissed as an ineffective strategy.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s simple, Guy. What is the point in tediously shackling people in fear? Indeed, fear makes people obedient. However, that’s not the best way to utilize their full potential. What’s more, remember that fear gradually fades away. Regardless of how much tragedy you inflict on mankind, they will eventually forget. Conversely, resentment will be the only thing that remains.”

“Hmm. Continue.”

“Their resentment will eventually turn into hatred, and they will begin to seek revenge against the one that oppresses them. That’s exactly what human beings, clever but lacking wisdom, will do as they are not aware of the stark difference in absolute power between us. If they are instigated by monsterkind and the like, they will soon resort to committing foolish acts.”

“Well. I would slaughter them before they could carry out those stupid decisions.”

“Kufufufu, it’d be futile. Considering how stupid humans are, their memories about the massacre would eventually vanish. It is unavoidable because their species cycles through generations so quickly. But—”

Diablo paused briefly, then faced Guy with a serious expression.

“Compared to the unipolar concentration doctrine of the Rossos, the redistribution of wealth rebuilds relationships between countries while maintaining some degree of equity. Thus, a new economic principle emerges.”

“Which is?”

“The new economic principle—by providing the foolish human race with different options, they will be under the illusion that they are the ones who have chosen their own future, and innately believe that they created it. This system, unlike human memory, won’t disappear over time. It will come to rule the world of man semi-permanently. Managing that will be Rimuru-sama’s job—in other words, our job.”

Ooh, Diablo’s talking sense. If people believed they created it, then they’ll take care of it themselves? I mean, was that even my original intention? I felt like I had said something along those lines, but I didn’t think it was that big of a takeaway… Starting with the premise that it would succeed was also a little daunting.

“I see. If you control the economy and guarantee security for free, the weak will undoubtedly depend on you. A society in which everything is decided by a bloodless war. Maybe it is even better than what the Rossos had in mind.”

Guy nodded to himself, as if he now saw Diablo in a more positive light.

“Of course. It will be a world where many are happy, rather than an elite wealthy few. The supply and demand created there will produce new possibilities. That’s Rimuru-sama’s wish, Guy.”

Welp, he isn’t wrong.

What I was looking forward to, was the improvement of cultural life. Movies, music, comics, and novels—I wanted to see more entertainment available for the masses to enjoy. In order to create such art, possessing a stable livelihood was essential. I wished to help people lead fulfilling lives so that new hidden talents could be discovered.

With that being said, I haven’t given it much thought beyond that.

“Meaning, once you experience and appreciate a blessed period of peace, you will be afraid to lose it?”

“That’s right. If I had to sum it all up in one word, it’d be the concept of ‘gratitude.’ People would thank Rimuru-sama for protecting their peace, and therefore become cooperative for the sake of maintaining world stability. I believe it is more effective than your idea of control through fear.”

The next thing I knew, Diablo and Guy were nodding together as if they had understood one another.

After listening to Diablo’s conjecture about the future, Luminas and Leon—and even their subordinates—looked at me, seemingly impressed. I couldn’t exactly reveal that this whole thing wasn’t actually my original intention in this serious atmosphere.

“However, it’ll require a long-term outlook and careful calculation to put that into practice, won’t it? If you don’t manage it well, I can picture the number of people growing out of control. Could you look after and handle that many?”

Oi oi, they aren’t exactly pets you need to take care of. Don’t phrase it as if they’re some Japanese rice fish pets that are getting overpopulated inside a fish tank.

“Hm, are you implying that Rimuru-sama cannot see that far into the future? That may be an arduous task for you, but it’s nothing Rimuru-sama can’t handle in his spare time. So, allow me to inform you that there is no need to worry.”

Oi. Why are you already assuming that I will manage it?

To be honest, I believe I once told Diablo that it would just be like the demon lords who controlled the world from behind the scenes. If I said that in front of Guy and the others, they’d probably be annoyed.

Though I was concerned, it turned out that my worries were unfounded. Rather, it was—

“I see. Well, I’ll leave it up to you. I’m not too optimistic, but I have nothing at stake if you fail. The only thing left for me to do then is to weed out those stupid idiots with my own hands. Let’s see how you handle your responsibilities,” Guy commented with a surprising grin.

Having been forewarned, all I could do was prepare myself for the worst. Since I had nodded in agreement with him earlier, I couldn’t really say no now.

“Diablo exaggerated a tad, but he is, for the most part, not wrong. It’s a bit idealistic, but I do hope that will happen one day. Even if you hadn’t said anything, I aim to achieve world peace my own way,” I promised Guy.

Thus, before I could fully process what was going on, the Octagram had officially entrusted me with the management of the Western Nations.

Well then, it would have been nice to end the meeting on that pleasant note, but there were still other problems.

“Rimuru, I’ll give you a small piece of advice. Jaune, or Carrera, has a violent temper and a penchant for unleashing nuclear magic whenever she feels like it. If you don’t keep a tight rein on her, this precious capital will be reduced to ashes,” warned Leon.

Following that little bit of news, Luminas also shared her insight. “That’s right. Let me add another thing. As I mentioned earlier, the Violet that I know of is gloomy and malicious. She is a being synonymous with inhumanity. Unlike monsterkind, she does not seem to have any intention of eradicating the human race. On the other hand, she has a very fickle and volatile personality. Although she appears to be acting as a cheerful little girl in front of you, I suggest you keep your guard up.”

Yep, they both revealed something rather unsettling. What’s more, even though it was never directly mentioned, it seemed that Testarossa was more troublesome than those two.

This became a problem. No, it wasn’t appropriate to say it became one. To be precise, I finally came to the realization that this whole situation was a massive headache.

Now that I knew the three demonesses were actually primordial demons, I had to take charge of them. If something went wrong, then I would be held accountable for their actions… Despite the fact that they were supposed to be Diablo’s subordinates, that excuse wouldn’t fly.

I had already promised Elmesia-san that I would take responsibility, so it was too late for me to refuse.

I wanted to punch my naive self for not knowing what I was really getting into, but I guess I had to suffer the consequences for being such a carefree person at that time.

Compared to managing human society, this one seemed to be a bigger pain in the ass. The thought made me depressed, and I let out a mental sigh.

Once Guy finished talking, Ramiris, Dino, and Veldora stood up, as if on cue.

“Well, it seems like we’re just bothering you guys, so I’ll leave the rest to you!”

“Right. I also have something important to do. Vesta-san is waiting for me, so I’ll see you later, Guy!”

“Then, I should return to guard the labyrinth. Ahh, busy, busy, Ga-ha-ha-ha!”

Noting their well-rehearsed choreography, it wasn’t hard to figure out that they were planning to escape.

Dino, in particular, was evidently tired of having the proverbial finger pointed at him, and thus made his announcement without even a shred of sincerity.

“Huh?” Guy retorted, and unable to let it go that easily, took another jab, “You working? What a sorry excuse for a joke.”

“No, no, it’s the truth!” came the reply, but instead of Dino, it was actually from Ramiris. “You see, Dino is also helping out as my assistant!”

That bit of news came as a genuine shock to Guy. Dismissing whatever came from Dino’s mouth was one thing, but when even Ramiris backed up his claim, Guy was left with no choice but to believe him.

“Dino is working? Really? Rimuru, just what kind of magic did you use?!”

Guy’s astonishment was directed at me this time, but I also struggled to come up with an answer myself.

“I don’t know either! In our country, we have a simple rule: ‘If you do not work, then you do not eat.’ He was no exception, that’s all, no magic involved!”

I would’ve had a much easier time if that kind of convenient magic was at my disposal. Thankfully, I somehow managed to get my point across to Guy since he didn’t push the subject any further.

Ramiris and the other two had hastily retreated from the room. Their impeccable timing was hardly a surprise, given how they had already polished off all the tea and snacks Shuna had prepared. Geez, what upstanding guys.

“Well, fine. I thoroughly chewed Dino out this time, so maybe he’ll finally put some effort into his reports now,” Guy muttered quietly.

As I’d mentioned, that kind of talk would be more appropriate if I weren’t sitting right here. How was I supposed to deal with such a brazen admission of espionage? Well, I doubt Guy would’ve even listened if I’d told him. Plus, it was probably better to spin this in a positive light—we could be honest with our intentions.

I decided to leave it at that and changed the topic.

“So, did you come all this way just to ask about Testarossa and the other two?”

If that was all he wanted to do, then he would’ve left by now. And seeing how he was still here, there must’ve been something else on his mind. I wasn’t particularly keen on inviting more problems, but if I hadn’t asked, I wouldn’t have found out.

“That was troubling me too, but the reason for my visit is different,” Guy clarified, slumping back into his chair.

His gaze wandered over everyone in the room and came to rest on Leon.

“I swung by after meeting these guys who call themselves the ‘Moderate Clown Troupe.’”

“Oh?”

“Aren’t they the ones you’ve been making deals with?” Guy asked.

“Yes,” Leon replied.

No, wait, wait. This is an important revelation, not something you can just gloss over!

“Hey,” I interjected, “so did you meet with Yuuki, too?”

“Yeah,” Guy frankly responded to my question.

I had recently ordered Souei to search the Freedom Association’s headquarters and branches. I hesitated to think that Yuuki had intended for yesterday’s encounter, and so I figured he would show up in the association headquarters, where he was based. Although he likely would’ve made efforts to reappear unnoticed, I cautioned Souei and his subordinates to keep an eye out for disguises and substitutes while they reconnoitered the location.

I hadn’t received any reports of movement as of yet. I also would’ve never guessed that Guy had encountered Yuuki and his troupe.

“Then, does that mean you were conspiring with Yuuki?” I ventured.

“What? Don’t be stupid. Those bastards were trying to escape to the East, so I punished them a little.”

I was under the impression that Guy and Yuuki were on the same side, but evidently, they weren’t. That tidbit came as a relief to me, but it still didn’t explain Guy’s motive.

“So you didn’t kill them?” inquired Leon.

While that concerned me too, there was more beneath the surface. Did Yuuki intend to abandon everything he had built up in the West and flee to the East? Like, I knew he was gutsy, but that was a terrifyingly bold decision to make.

However, catching Guy’s ire was definitely a stroke of bad luck for them. Since he said it was just a punishment, he probably didn’t kill them. Still, they were undeniably given a serious beatdown. Well, I wasn’t about to feel sorry for them; on the contrary, they had certainly deserved every bit of it.

“They didn’t die. At first, I considered capturing them to sell you a favor. However, the situation changed,” Guy explained, and went on to recount what happened when he encountered Yuuki.

As a result, a rough outline of Yuuki’s surreptitious behavior became clear: Yuuki was the employer and the boss of the Moderate Clown Troupe. Well, this only proved that my—Raphael-san’s—prediction was accurate.

As for the numerous feats and misdeeds Yuuki had carried out:

First, he developed the Adventurer Mutual Aid Association into the Freedom Association.

Second, he conspired with the Rosso family, who controlled the council, and handled clandestine work for them, which included brokering deals with Demon Lord Leon.

Third, he backed Clayman as demon lord and was manipulating him from behind the scenes.

Fourth, he crushed Echidna, the Mother of Darkness, which commanded the underworld of the East, and engineered the surreptitious organization named Cerberus.

By day, he was the head of the Freedom Association, and by night, he led a secret society.

This was the first time I’d heard of Echidna, and apparently, it was a considerably large, underground group. The information was authentic, since Leon was the one who provided it.

By the way, the Orthrus Slave Trade that Masayuki allegedly destroyed was supposedly a subsidiary of Cerberus, so Yuuki must’ve been involved with that. He was immensely gifted at destroying a preexisting organization and seizing control.

Although the strategy sounded pretty easy in theory, it was actually a Herculean task in practice. He had achieved all this within ten years, which clearly placed him a cut above merely “competent.” It wouldn’t even be an exaggeration to call him a genius.

Despite Yuuki’s many talents, he still suffered setbacks that stemmed from his overconfident personality. A major flaw of his was that he would misjudge an opponent’s strength.

One look from Guy should have been enough for him to understand just how much trouble he was in. Fortunately for him, Guy decided to let him off the hook, so I suppose I could only commend his exceptional luck.

Yet the fact that Yuuki survived that encounter left me with mixed feelings. I wouldn’t go so far as to wish death upon my fellow countryman; at the same time, I couldn’t forgive his actions, either.

Yuuki had the facade of a kind person, all the while secretly leading Leon and the Rosso family, which was headed by Granbell, around by their noses. Not only that, but he also employed the Moderate Clown Troupe to set Hinata up for a fight against me…

His utmost goal was this childish dream—one of world domination—and I couldn’t even laugh because of the implications.

By the way, why did Guy forgive Yuuki so easily?

“So,” I began, addressing Guy directly, “what are you planning, since you let Yuuki go like that?”

It would pay off big time if I got an answer—that was why I had inquired.

“Well, it was all for a game,” Guy replied nonchalantly.

The word “game” didn’t make much sense to me, yet Guy seemed to ignore my confusion and continued on with his story.

According to him, the Eastern Empire would soon make a move. Guy had let Yuuki go because he was offered a deal: Yuuki would sow chaos among the ranks of the Eastern Empire in exchange for sparing his life.

Incredulous, I asked Guy, “Um, hey, you don’t seem to want the Western Nations to collapse—what’s up with that?”

The answer I got was even more surprising than the one before.

“It’s my job to manage them so that they don’t collapse. Well, I don’t want too many of them, though. The entire human race will be ruled by demon lords. That’s my ultimate objective.”

That must have been the game Guy was talking about. When he has complete control over humanity, victory is his.

“No no, then why did you order Mizeri-san to go destroy the council?”

The members of the council would’ve been wiped out right before the impending invasion from the East. Had that happened, the Western Nations would’ve been royally screwed. Any efforts to coordinate a defense amongst countries would’ve been impossible, their fates most likely sealed before they even had a chance to fight.

“You can just call her Mizeri,” Guy smirked at my question, then continued. “I approved of Mizeri’s operation in order to unite the West.”

What does that even mean—

«Answer. It is likely that the plan was to bolster Master’s control in the West by instilling fear in council member states.»

Uh, so in other words, what he implied was something like this: the council members are wiped out by a demon lord, and the humans fall into panic. Then, if I were to reach out to them, the humans wouldn’t hesitate to seek my protection. To that end, a little sacrifice was trivial.

«Answer. That is likely correct.»

I see. They had purposefully concocted an extreme plot, which could easily paint me in a good light. Though I felt that Guy’s aim and Mizeri’s intentions didn’t quite align, they were trying to work things in my favor.

No, that’s not it.

I guess they thought they could use me to manage the Western Nations. But I was one step ahead of Guy, and already had my hands on the West. While I didn’t really think that far ahead, the council was completely within Testarossa’s unrelenting grasp.

Guy’s goal wasn’t to destroy humanity, but rather the exact opposite: he wanted to properly manage the human race so they wouldn’t perish due to their own stupidity.

Thus, if I were to take on that role, it would be a boon to him. Nevertheless, this failure marked a positive development for him.

I figured one thing out though—Guy is a slacker at heart.

I was now convinced that things would be better if I handled them myself.

“Then,” I pondered aloud, “you won’t have any problem with me dominating the West, I assume?”

“Nope. Unless those idiots forget who’s boss, I have no intention of butting in.”

That’s a relief.

It felt like we skipped over a couple steps I had otherwise expected, but if he was fine with it, then I had no qualms about managing the Western Nations from now on.

“In that case, I’ll accept the offer. By the way, do you mind ending your assaults on the northern regions of Ingracia?”

I’d heard from several sources that Guy’s subordinates regularly ravaged those lands. That area had been under the protection of Razul until he met his demise at Shion’s determined hands.

Since it was an emergency at the time, Sarion’s emperor, Elmesia, dispatched the Magus to subdue them. It would be out of character to thank her for it, but it was also a little too convenient for me to ask her a favor like that again.

As long as I was in charge of the Western Nations, I’d have to shoulder the burden of defending them, which entailed hefty defense expenditures. I’d really like to avoid that, and fighters of Razul’s caliber were few and far between to begin with.

“Please be at ease. Those chores can all be left to Testarossa,” Diablo reassured me with a smirk, as if he had solved all my worries.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Guy interjected before I could even ask if that was okay. “Those guys would need a place to unwind from time to time, so just leave them to their own devices.”

Even Guy agreed with what Diablo suggested.

In that moment, I knew that a normie like me would never understand what went through a demon’s head.

As Diablo had recommended, I decided to hand the demons off to Testarossa. And because I took Guy at his word, I judged there wouldn’t be any disagreements about it.

This was how I cemented my hegemony over the West, but it wasn’t over just yet.

“All right, Rimuru, can I leave the matter regarding the Eastern Empire to you then?”

Prompted by Luminas’s question, I suddenly remembered that little problem again.

“When you say the Empire is making a move, do you mean they’re taking military action?” I ventured to confirm it for myself, and Guy nodded as if it were obvious.

“I’ve heard the Empire has been conducting a number of military exercises recently,” Hinata added. “There’s been a lot of talk about it at the council as well.” The fact that she was aware of the situation suggested that she probably had a plan in mind.

As for me, I was rather skeptical about whether an invasion from the Empire was truly feasible. I had deliberated over the three possible routes of invasion and deemed them far too arduous and unrealistic to assault.

Apart from the vast losses they would incur, the Empire stood to gain little if they ultimately decided to conquer the West, ending in a Pyrrhic victory. A war of aggression was, after all, waged for profit. Prosperous countries became promising targets for those who had no food to eat, no resources to use, nor any space to live. If those problems could be solved, then there was no real reason for bloodshed.

However, it came as no surprise that this was not an easy problem to solve. There was no reason for a rich country to make sacrifices for a poor country, and if they were demanded to do so as a matter of course, it would definitely cause disputes among other nations.

That was why affluent countries also held armies for self-defense. It was important for them to dissuade aggressors with the guarantee of a heavy cost for victory. Should the blood they spill outweigh the potential gains they would make, then only a fool would resort to war.

Even so, they still wanted to wage war. The reason for that was—

«Answer. They are likely confident in their odds of victory.»

Is there no other possible explanation?

Since I’d taken control of the council, it was inconceivable for there to be an insider. But if there were one, they might have developed some new technology or devised some outlandish tactics… Or perhaps they possessed some kind of trump card.

“Hinata.”

“I know. You’re wondering about the structure of the Dwarven Kingdom that you requested me to evaluate before, right? From what I’ve gathered, it’s not impossible to get a large army through.”

Hinata instantly read my intentions and gave me the information I wanted.

The Dwarven Kingdom was neutral, and I doubted that Gazel would permit it, but it was the safest route to use to invade the West.

No, perhaps—

“I wasn’t sure it would happen, so I had dismissed the thought, but there really is a chance that they’ll attack the Dwarven Kingdom first, huh?”

“Hmph, don’t try to hide it. I know your request for me to investigate that route was based on that very suspicion.”

Huh, Hinata’s complimenting me? It was just something that popped into my mind, but whatever.

“Was I exposed? Well, since that’s a possibility, we need to deal with it first.”

I should contact Gazel and conjure up a plan together.

The fact that we had delegated military authority of the council to Tempest was already becoming more trouble than it was worth. Nonetheless, it was now our inescapable responsibility to bear the brunt of the Empire.

“If you weren’t here, Granbell and Luminas would’ve had to fight the Empire,” Guy informed me, his voice indifferent like it wasn’t his problem.

The Empire’s military power was unknown.

The Rosso family’s combined strength, the Holy Knight Order, and Lubelius’s forces—led by Hinata—would have been the ones entrusted to counter the Empire’s advance.

Guy didn’t seem too concerned with which side would win, but even then, he had accepted Yuuki’s offer; he must’ve had his own reasons for that. The key thing to find out was what he meant by the word “game,” but I didn’t think he would give me a satisfactory answer even if I asked.

“I’ll help as well, but I won’t be under your command, okay?”

There was no reason for Hinata to be on the front line, so she had a pretty good point.

“I still don’t understand why they want to initiate war, but we won’t be sitting on our hands, that’s for sure. Hinata, I want you to be ready in case the Empire invades in a very unconventional way.”

“Understood. We’ll take care of the agent who disguised himself as a merchant, too.”

Hinata reassured me with a somewhat strained smile. That was a relief; there was nothing more for me to add.

“Rimuru. If you are defeated, then I will have to fight. Work hard and make sure that does not happen,” Luminas commanded, as if my failure would be a major annoyance.

Luminas couldn’t afford to worry about a war right now. She had to assess the human casualties surrounding the collapsed Grand Cathedral, as well as its reconstruction efforts, back in her own nation. Honestly, I was grateful to have gotten Hinata’s cooperation, given everything that was going on.

“What worries me is if we can even cooperate with Yuuki…”

The potential prospect of working together made me feel quite emotionally conflicted.

The Farmus Kingdom had been led around by the nose, and my companions—including Shion—were harmed, all because of Yuuki. He was the one who controlled Clayman, and if we went further back, was also involved with the Orc Lord, the incident caused by the previous Geld. Even if you were told to let bygones be bygones, it was difficult to readily accept that sentiment.

“Rimuru-sama, are you worried because of us by any chance?”

Shion could sometimes be unusually sharp. I hadn’t even breathed a word about that, yet she spoke as if she had already seen my inner turmoil.

“I guess you could say that. With everything that we’ve endured, it’s hard to just suddenly trust him.”

Or rather, having faith in him was out of the question. And when it came to war, there was nothing more dangerous than an untrustworthy ally.

“Even I don’t know what that runaway Yuuki has planned next. I’m not really interested either; I just hope he’ll do his best in sabotaging the Empire,” Guy revealed rather nonchalantly.

I thought for a moment after I heard that.

As I’d expected, the idea of including Yuuki as a part of our military forces was a bit far-fetched.

“Kufufufufu. Let us ask Souei-dono to investigate his recent activity,” suggested Diablo.

“Please do so.”

We would hold off on the matter of Yuuki for now. But the question of whether or not we would find common ground was entirely up in the air. At the very least, there was no way we could work together without at least receiving a proper apology.

Since we were also running a country, we might have had to consider reconciling with him depending on how he played his cards. Although, my heart definitely wasn’t kind enough to disregard his actions without some form of compensation.

“Shion, will that be enough for you?”

“Of course! If he remains hostile, I will crush him, and if he is willing to reconcile, then I will forgive him after just one punch!”

Please don’t end him in that punch—I silently begged her in my mind.

If that really wound up happening, then we just had to say it was an accident. Since neither Shion nor I had the intent to kill, we could insist that it wasn’t on purpose.

On that note, we decided to postpone the matter of Yuuki.

That was not the end of Guy’s business with us as he had one more thing to discuss. His real reason for coming was related to the Hero—in other words, Chloe.

“I knew that Granbell’s goal was to free what Luminas had desperately tried to hide in that place. So, I’ve been watching over it to make sure it doesn’t go off rampaging. But then Diablo told me to let Rimuru handle it.”

Guy said he then dropped by to check up on what happened after that.

Just when did this exchange happen—was what I’d initially thought, but then I remembered there was a short interval where Diablo momentarily stepped out while the battle was still raging on. That’s probably when he made that unwanted negotiation.

I sighed internally, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I didn’t know how things would’ve turned out if Guy ultimately decided to join the battle at that point.

“We were just talking about that earlier, but this is good timing. We can go over it once more, and I’ll explain it myself.”

Taking the lead here, I decided to elucidate everything. I didn’t think Leon or Luminas would say anything uncalled for, but better safe than sorry. It was probably a good idea to hide critical information, like Chloe casually leaping through time, or that she had gone through several loops already. I thought that if I never mentioned it in the first place, then there was no way for him to find out.

“—And for that reason, we defeated the rampaging Chronoa and resolved the case.”

Although this wound up dumping all of the blame on Chronoa, it was done to protect Chloe. It would have only led to trouble if we explained that Chloe was Chronoa. I wanted to keep it a secret from Guy.

“I see, you went through a lot. Then, can I ask just one thing?”

“Ahh, ask me anything.”

“That girl over there, no matter how you look at it, is a ‘Hero.’ How are you going to explain that?”

Grr. I tried to cover up the story, but it was impossible with Guy.

Next, I attempted to give a probable yet absurd explanation. “This child’s hidden power was awakened in that fight—”

“Don’t lie.”

I knew it.

Awakening to new powers in the middle of a fight was a classic development, but as expected, such an excuse didn’t work.

“The truth is…” I hesitated, wondering what to say.

Leon spoke up and covered for me. “The person I’ve been constantly searching for with ‘specific summoning’ is this Chloe. By whatever whim of fate, she was there, but thanks to that, we were saved.”

I had absolutely no idea how Leon planned to continue the tale, but playing along appeared to be the only way to deceive Guy.

“That is correct. I was surprised too, but this girl, Chloe, was the perfect vessel to seal Chronoa.”

Before I could interject, Luminas cut in and followed Leon’s lead. The scale of this whole turn of events ended up getting even more complicated, but more importantly, was I supposed to be the person to continue after her?

“A sealing vessel, you say?” Guy muttered, then glanced at me with weary eyes.

That’s what I want to ask, too—I thought to myself, but it was unthinkable to tell the truth now that the story had gone this far. I had no choice but to join in.

“Right. According to Leon, she possesses a special ability that allows her to steal the power of any opponent and seal it away. I was skeptical at first, but once I witnessed its effect with my own eyes, I had no choice but to believe it.”

How’s this?

I handed it off to Leon, signaling that the rest was up to him.

“Honestly. I ended up having my trump card taken from me, but it’s better than allowing it to uncontrollably rampage around.”

Luminas quickly joined in with a bitter expression, delivering it in an extremely convincing fashion. She’s incredible as always—I quietly admired her.

All that was left was for Leon to wrap it up.

“…That’s what happened. There are a lot of strong people in this world, including you, Guy. I sought to protect Chloe in case of a threat, but I didn’t think that she would expend her power as soon as I met her. I really am unlucky.”

Leon let out a depressed sigh—paired with a look that made me seriously question if he was pretending or not. If Luminas won the award for best actress, then Leon would’ve won best actor as well. Thankfully, the story now came perfectly together: by sealing away Chronoa, Chloe gained the power of a ‘Hero.’ That was the setting we had concocted.

“Hmm. You guys aren’t trying to trick me, are you?”

“No, not at all.”

“Being overly doubtful is a bad habit of yours.”

“That’s right. You shouldn’t worry about such trivial things.”

We denied Guy’s suspicion in perfect harmony. The reason why we were able to instantly cooperate was because the three of us all cared for Chloe.

“But you see,” Guy mused, “that girl definitely gained the power of a Hero, right? Would it truly be okay to leave things as they are?”

Leon stood up in response to Guy’s words, but Guy merely smirked and placated him by saying: “Relax, I won’t touch her.”

“Then that’s fine. Just remember, if you ever think of pointing a blade at Chloe, then you’ll have to go through me first,” Leon warned, then sat back down.

While that didn’t exactly help the tense atmosphere, Guy never had any murderous intent. I was on guard because I’d thought that he might cause a problem, but he subverted my expectations with his cordial behavior. I felt relieved as a result, but in an instant, something happened that made my blood run cold.

The bright glint of a moving blade.

I had no clue where he brought it out from, but Guy had a longsword in his hand and was currently swinging down at Chloe’s neck with it.

Guy’s swift swordsmanship was worthy of being called godlike. My perceptual speed, which stretched things out a million times more than normal, told me that I was already too late even if I moved immediately.

Not only that, Leon and Luminas faced the same dilemma. Everyone had an air of despair and tried to turn away from the horror that would transpire.

But, in the next moment, a sharp and clear clang echoed.

«—?!»

The small Chloe suddenly grew up and blocked Guy’s attack; I didn’t know when she had pulled a sword out, either. Her clothes had also changed to that of a Hero. Chloe’s usage of her Holy Spirit Armor was fairly natural, and she seemed to have already mastered it.



“Nice to meet you, Demon Lord Guy-san. Even though it’s my first time seeing you in person, I always knew you were strong.”

“Ahahaha, you’re not bad as well. Chloe, was it? People capable of using that power properly are, including me, quite scarce in number.”

Guy and Chloe exchanged greetings. Despite the friendly behavior between the two, I was on edge.

This was because I didn’t understand what had just happened. I couldn’t track their movements even with my perception cranked up by a factor of one million.

It became abundantly clear that this phenomenon wasn’t due to some kind of super speed. There was no turbulence in the surrounding air, nor were there any abnormalities in the laws of physics.

Magic, or something else, perhaps. It’s times like these that my trustworthy partner comes into play. Now, I request an explanation, Raphael-san!

«Report. Unknown. Failed to ‘Analyze and Assess’ the phenomenon performed by individual ‘Chloe Aubert.’»

Uh, seriously? For Wisdom King Raphael-san to say “I don’t know” was certainly a rare sight to behold. Whether it was prediction or partial calculation, it would normally give me at least some information. The fact that it couldn’t even provide that this time meant it really was a supernatural event outside of its comprehension. In other words, this was impossible to deal with.

I was definitely taken aback, but I glanced around to gauge everyone else’s reactions. Leon and Luminas appeared just as pale as I did. However, instead of being angered by Guy’s actions, it felt as if they were desperate to understand what had taken place right in front of their eyes.

The others were out of the question. They evidently didn’t even notice the movement of the swords, so they couldn’t have possibly recognized the dire situation.

If anything, Diablo was the only one who looked remotely surprised. Maybe he had some idea of what had just occurred. I’d ask him about that later, but first, I had to stop Guy and Chloe.

With an expression that read, it’s my turn, Chloe began attacking Guy.

They were amicable enough when they exchanged greetings, so why is this happening…

They crossed swords several times. It felt like I was watching a stop motion animation; the continuity to the flow of their sword exchanges was nonexistent—or so it seemed. This was bad. I couldn’t fully follow everything, so this was all based on conjecture.

“Stop, stooop!!”

I forced my body in between Chloe and Guy. It was a risky gamble trying to predict where they’d pop up next, but it thankfully worked.

“Hey, don’t do anything rash. You could’ve been cut down by mistake.”

“That’s right, Rimuru. Guy wasn’t seriously fighting; he was just testing me. Although, I’m really happy that you were so worried about me,” Chloe reassured me, adding a hug and planting a kiss on my cheek. This, too, was another stop motion movement. I’ll declare that this was unavoidable force majeure.

Speaking of Chloe, right as she kissed me, she became small again. No, it was more like she became the original Chloe again. She then yelled, while turning red and shaking with anger, “Enough! How dare you hug Rimuru-san on your own, and even ki-kiss!”

“Was that Chronoa just now?” I asked.

“Yes. We switched in the middle.”

Apparently, while Chloe was the one who blocked the first attack, Chronoa took over for the rest of the battle. They looked completely identical, so telling the difference was a little challenging.

As soon as Chloe calmed down, Leon picked her up and carried her in his arms. He cautioned, “Rimuru, I greatly appreciate the fact that you helped Chloe, but I cannot allow you to get any closer to her.”

“Enough already, you worry too much, Leon onii-chan.”

After placing Chloe down on her chair, Leon stared coldly at Guy.

“Guy, didn’t you just say you wouldn’t lay a hand on Chloe?”

“Sorry. I was just testing her for a bit. Obviously, I had no intention of killing her.”

“Even if that’s the case, you shouldn’t joke around with that level of strength, regardless of whether or not you had murderous intent.”

Leon was fairly angry and refused to back down against Guy, given his long-winded complaint.

It was Chloe herself that intervened between the two, desperately explaining that Guy had no intention of hurting her, and that she wanted to test Guy’s strength as well. Consequently, Chronoa seemed to have gone on a slight rampage, so it wasn’t entirely Guy’s fault. Perhaps Chloe—no, Chronoa—wanted a glimpse of how strong Guy, the cause of her death in the future, was.

The current situation was entirely different from the future that Chronoa experienced. She possessed a new power that she never had before—if my memory serves me correctly, I believe it was the Ultimate Skill ‘Spacetime King Yog-Sothoth.’

Chronoa was rather interested to see if that power would work on Guy.

«—!! One possibility has emerged. Assuming that the individual ‘Chloe Aubert’ can use the power of the Unique Skill ‘Time Travel,’ which has been integrated into Ultimate Skill ‘Yog-Sothoth,’ to control time, ‘Analyze and Assess’ will always fail, since it is impossible to observe phenomena that are not on the same time axis.»

Ah, is that so…

The true nature of the power that Chloe acquired was the ability to stop time, or something to that effect.

Raphael, too, was using ‘Analyze and Assess’ on the inner workings of the Unique Skill ‘Time Travel,’ but it’d still take some time before it got any conclusive results. It looked as though ‘Time Travel’ had firmly been incorporated into Chloe’s ‘Yog-Sothoth.’

Well yeah, it’s hard to understand something you can’t even observe.

In short, Chloe was the one who made that power her own. While the thought of that was already absurd, I also wanted to scream aloud that being able to stop time was basically cheating.

Needless to say, I wouldn’t be able to see anything even with my perceptual speed stretched by a million. There was no way for us, whose bodies yielded to the flow of time, to perceive events that happened in a frozen world.

No, hold on a second.

If we assume that is correct, then doesn’t that mean those who can’t reach that time-frozen world will never win against those that have, no matter how strong they are…?

«Answer. That presumption is likely correct.»

Hey, you’re kidding me, right?

As much as I didn’t want to believe it, I had no choice but to at least acknowledge that potential. I mean, even Chronoa was once killed by Guy. It was only natural that if someone could willfully stop time, then you never stood a chance. On the other hand, if we applied the same reasoning, didn’t that mean Chloe could stand up to Guy right now?

Even though she bore the appearance of a cute little girl, Chloe’s strength had already surpassed mine. And with that realization, I broke out in a cold sweat without anyone knowing.

In the end, Leon gave in and a settlement was reached.

“Just like you care deeply for Ramiris, I care deeply for Chloe. Keep that in mind,” Leon warned, strongly insinuating that he wouldn’t stand idly by next time, and sat down.

“I feel the same as well, Guy. I certainly admit that you are the strongest, but it would hurt to lose our cooperation, wouldn’t it? Unless you are serious about antagonizing her, know that laying a hand on Chloe will make us enemies.”

Luminas seemed like she was also secretly upset and joined Leon in berating Guy.

Normally, it would’ve been foolish to declare outright who you thought of as a loved one, but with Guy, the opposite was true. There was no stopping him if he truly became hostile towards Chloe—those two thought of it this way, and so they demanded he not lay a finger on her.

“Okay, okay. I don’t want any trouble either. As long as she doesn’t get in my way, I won’t mess around with your precious thing.”

Surprisingly, Guy was rather understanding, and so the safety of Chloe was secured.

Meanwhile, our beloved Chloe was far stronger than any of us, but it was probably better to keep that to myself.

The sun was already setting when the meeting ended.

Shuna had thankfully prepared dinner, so we moved to a different location and started the banquet. Or rather, there was no sign of anyone wanting to leave until we ate.

On today’s menu was kakuni 6 pork—well, a monster substitute—with fried eggplant and tofu. That was paired with miso soup and freshly made rice—more specifically, a pure-black rice called “Magic Black Rice”—as the sides. This wasn’t one of our multi-course meals, given that today’s meeting was unplanned, so I refused to hear any complaints.

“What is this, there’s no tempura,” Luminas grumbled aloud.

Who knew she was such a big fan of it?

“It’s all right, Luminas. This should be very tasty as well. You must not underestimate Rimuru’s obsession with food.”

Hinata took my side out of nowhere. Not sure how I should take that kind of compliment if that’s the only thing I’m getting praised for. Oh well, moving on.

Thus, the banquet continued, and it appeared that everyone was satisfied.

“I see. Your country’s dishes are somewhat okay too,” Guy noted, sounding impressed.

“It has a strange taste, but at this level, I suppose it passes.”

Given how Leon completely finished his food without any complaints, I decided to take it as his way of praising me.

“Hmm, what Hinata said is right. This is another abnormal dish, but it is remarkably delicious.”

“It’s amazing as usual. It’s a taste that I’ve really missed. Getting another chance to eat this meal makes me glad to be alive.”

Luminas appeared content, and Hinata was extremely overjoyed.

No, come to think of it, isn’t this the first kakuni pork and rice she’s had in two thousand years?

“Maybe white rice would’ve been better?”

“Thank you for your concern. I’ve already gotten used to these kinds of odd-looking foods.”

I see, that’s a relief. If Hinata lived inside Chloe for two thousand years, she would’ve seen a lot of varied dishes, and that explained her indifference towards the color. Even before that, she must’ve been unable to taste food, unlike Chloe. Perhaps it was because she could only get visual information, but the simple fact that she could finally taste what she ate was enough to make her emotional. When I imagined Hinata’s situation this way, it made sense for her to be so thoroughly impressed.

In the end, the banquet concluded with favorable feedback. The demon lords quickly prepared to leave as soon as they were done eating. While it would’ve been nice for them to stay a bit, since they already finished their business here, they had no plans to prolong their visit.

“Chloe, if you don’t like it here, don’t hesitate to call me. I will come get you right away,” Leon said sourly, seemingly refusing to give up.

There was a major dispute on the topic of who would take care of Chloe.

“My friends are here, and I like the place where Rimuru-san is.”

Although we all respected Chloe’s decision, I had my doubts that Leon would so readily accept it. After all, Leon hadn’t even tried to hide his clinginess with Chloe.

Despite my reservations about the methods he chose, ultimately, his desire to protect Chloe was genuine. And Leon’s feelings were clearly conveyed to her as well.

“Onii-chan. I was very happy to know that you were concerned for me. But you don’t have to worry like that. Because I am not a little kid anymore!” Chloe said as she hugged him.

Leon gave a gentle smile and patted Chloe’s head. They were childhood friends who grew up together like siblings, but Leon sincerely cared about Chloe.

She finally let go of him and changed to her adult form.

“See? If I borrow Chronoa’s power, I can change back to my grown-up form, so onii-chan doesn’t have to worry about me anymore,” Chloe beamed happily, as if she were trying to reassure Leon.

That smile had devastating power. It was…how should I put it…enchanting? It was an ephemeral smile, yet at the same time, made me feel her strength of heart—a smile filled with charm.

“I see. You have become an amazing woman. But that won’t change the fact that I care about you. You may rely on me anytime,” Leon declared to Chloe with a tender smile on his face.

As one would expect from Mr. Handsome Leon, it was an exceptionally mature-looking move, befitting of an adult.

I can only hope to imitate something like that—I thought to myself from the sidelines, but then, Leon suddenly turned around and stared at me coldly.

The difference was quite drastic. Really drastic.

“Chloe said that she became an adult, don’t tell me you…”

“No! I’m asexual so there’s no way that can happen!!”

He was even making terrible assumptions. When he faced me, that previous sense of handsome maturity had all but disappeared. I desperately tried to plead my case, and I thought he understood after Chloe noticed the topic of our conversation and got angry…but apparently, it was superficial.

“I believe you are already well aware of this,” Leon whispered to me as he left, “but never do anything that would expose Chloe to danger.”

Although I did think that he was being overprotective, Leon had used every tool at his disposal to look for Chloe, who got swept up in the world transfer along with him, so it wasn’t as though I couldn’t understand his worry, either.

On the bright side, he also returned home quietly. I promised to bring Chloe for a visit next time, and thanks to her, we might be able to establish diplomatic relations with El Dorado, which Demon Lord Leon ruled over. It was a bit annoying since he felt like a brother-in-law, but I had to live with it.

“Well, I suppose you have settled down where you are comfortable. Chloe, you are an important friend to me. I’m here for you if you ever need anything, so don’t hesitate to ask me for help. Please take care of yourself.”

Just like Leon, Luminas also fretted over Chloe. As for her, she felt like a sister-in-law, but obviously, I didn’t dare say that out loud.

It was best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Luminas said her goodbyes and departed with her entourage.

Since Hinata was also gone, the only person that remained was Guy. When I turned my head to see if he would leave, I saw Diablo still glued to his side. He began to speak. “Now then, shall we continue what I wasn’t able to finish a while ago—”

“No, I’ve heard enough of that already, so it’s quite all right,” Guy reassured.

“Kufufufu, there is no need to be shy.”

“Stop giving me weird invitations!”

What the heck are you doing, Diablo!

“Tsk, then I have no other choice. Let’s change the subject to the topic you wanted to hear about, the task Testarossa and the other girls took, and anecdotes about Rimuru-sama—”

Just how much does this guy want to talk?—I looked at him in dismay, and Guy appeared to feel the same way.

“No, no, you guys seem extremely busy right now, so I’ll come by again when things settle down,” Guy urgently declined and quickly ran away.

I was strangely impressed by the fact that even Guy had times where he was taken aback. After witnessing such an unexpected side of him, it made me think he wasn’t the unreasonable type. I still couldn’t afford to be careless around him, but maybe I didn’t have to worry as much as I thought. Since he accepted that Chloe was a Hero, I guess we could tentatively declare that all the big problems had been dealt with.

Now, the only things left unsettled were Yuuki’s movements and the intentions of the Eastern Empire, where he ran off to. I would put aside whether or not we would trust Yuuki for now.

A war, huh?—I sighed quietly to myself.

Solve one problem and another pops up. I felt depressed and thought about how nice it would be if things became peaceful again soon.

In spite of the fact that it was a verbal agreement, it was still a notable achievement that we were able to establish cooperation with two different demon lords. If a war truly broke out, just having allied countries that you could trust was something that made you feel more confident. I could expect support and, worst case scenario, they could consider taking in refugees.

Although, the best possible outcome was having no war in the first place. This all depended on how the other side acted, so all we could do was simply wait…

Since there was nothing I could accomplish by complaining, I decided to devise countermeasures. First, we had to begin defensive preparations and ensure that if we wound up waging war with the Empire, we could handle them.

Let’s be prepared for anything—I silently strengthened my resolve.