And thus, the plan had been set.

At this point, we would take a break and have lunch.

Because the atmosphere was already relaxed, the meal proceeded in a friendly manner.

Today’s lunch was kaiseki cuisine.12

Although we were in the middle of a break, we were still in the middle of a meeting, so we chose a menu that could properly entertain the dignitaries. Shuna had prepared it with great care.

Everyone used chopsticks.

Gazel had mastered it a long time now, and the chopstick culture was widespread in the empire, making us feel at ease to prepare the food Japanese style.

“As always, the food here is delicious.”

“It makes me want to drink.”

“Be more restrained, Vaughn! Even if it’s informal, we still have an important meeting to attend.”

“You’re such a serious man, Dolph. Rimuru-sama?”

“Yeah. I’d like some sake too, but…”

I nodded and glanced at Shuna.

She gave a smiling face.

Yup, it’s impossible.

“We’ll have to hold back for now and do our best for the rest of the meeting. Vaughn-san, you should learn from Dolph-san and be more serious!”

“Hahaha, that’s harsh. Then can I count on you for this evening?”

“Hey…”

“Of course you can, right Benimaru?”

“Yeah. Let’s take out our secret stash of black liquor and have a party!”

“Oh, that sounds good! Benimaru-dono has good taste too.”

“Hahaha, I heard that demons are famous for their love of alcohol.”

“What? Shuna drinks alcohol too?”

Benimaru said something surprising while I was casually ignoring the gossip. To my surprise, he said that Shuna drank alcohol.

The truth is…

“Brother, I only try it occasionally. Please do not lump me in with Shion.”

Oh, so she does drink.

I had thought Shuna was underage, but I guess age didn’t matter to a monster.

“Hahaha, sorry, sorry.”

“Shuna-sama! I don’t drink that much either!”

That’s a lie.

As far as I know, Shion and Alvis are the best drinkers in the world.

Benimaru also knew about this, so he smiled bitterly at it.

I didn’t imagine Benimaru to be a drinker, but I guess Alvis was his wife too. In that case, he might have been drinking with his wife, turning him into strong drinker.

Once you get used to it, it becomes something you start to enjoy.

Just do it in moderation.

Don’t just drink alcohol to get drunk.

I thought I should remind myself and others to enjoy in moderation.

The luncheon would have continued as light and pleasant, but suddenly, someone burst into tears.

All eyes were drawn to the person, wondering what was going on.

It was Calgurio.

“What’s wrong, sir? Is the food not to your liking?”

Shuna, who had rushed over to Calgurio, asked while comforting him.

Calgurio opened his mouth to reply.

“No, please excuse me. I just remembered something. I know it might be ridiculous for a military man to say this, but I sacrificed many men because of my foolish plan. Yet I am savoring this delicious meal knowing they will never return. I’m sorry, it was my fault…Farage, Gaster, and Zamud…I’m sorry…I’m so sorry.”

This guy is a crying drunk, isn’t he?

I hadn’t served him any alcohol, but it seems that he got drunk from just the atmosphere.

Still, I guess this was a good time.

“Testarossa.”

“Yes. I’ve already sent word to Moss and summoned those men.”

As expected of her.

Before I could even give the order, Testarossa had already read my intentions and acted upon them.

Then, in less than five minutes, dozens of men had showed up to the venue.

“Your Majesty Rimuru, Zamud is here upon hearing your call!”

The people who came were the same people that Calgurio had just mentioned, including Major General Zamud and his subordinates.

They seemed to have come running as fast as they could, their faces bright red with sweat. Despite this, they desperately struggled to formulate their words in order to greet me.

Zamud and these people had actually died once.

They were aboard the emperor’s flagship airship, and were caught up in Testarossa’s nuclear magic: ‘Death Streak,’ which wiped out their bodies along with their lives.

However, the amazing thing about Testarossa was that she remembered that I had received a plea from Calgurio for Zamud and the others’ lives, so she recovered their souls before the magic took effect.

“It all became possible because Rimuru-sama allowed me to evolve”—She was so humble saying such things, but from my point of view, I was just grateful for her memory.

And so, I took the souls of Zamud and the others from Testarossa and had them dwell in an Emulated Soul, establishing them in artificial human bodies (homunculi).

“You—aren’t you Zamud?! I heard Velgrynd-sama say that you were all dead, but you’re still alive!”

“It’s true though. I really doubt they could have survived the ‘Death Streak,’ so was it Testarossa who saved him?”

“That’s right, Velgrynd-sama. Rimuru-sama is a compassionate man.”

“Yeah, I have no doubt about that.”

“Very wise.”

Ufufufu, Ohohoho—The two were talking while smiling at one another.

I felt a little scared, so I gently took my eyes off the scene.

Zamud and the others had joined Calgurio and were congratulating each other on their safety.

As for Farage-san, it’s unfortunate, but I wasn’t all-powerful either, so I hoped they would forgive me. And if they felt sorry for the death of someone close, then please don’t ever engage in such a foolish act of war again.

A defensive war may be unavoidable, but a war of aggression is the essence of foolishness. I understand that the world was not just a pretty place, but I still couldn’t help thinking so.

Those in power should consider whether or not war was really necessary, putting their own families on the scale. I hoped that they would aim to eradicate barren conflict through dialogue as much as possible.

This I did not say aloud, but prayed for it in my heart.

\*

In the morning session, the general plan had been decided. The afternoon session was scheduled to reconfirm them and discuss the sharing of responsibilities.

“Now then, allow me to reconfirm. First, the Armed Nation of Dwargon.”

Testarossa began the session.

Then, she listed the topics in need of confirmation.

The first step was for Tempest and Dwargon to jointly approve the accession of the new Emperor. Then, in the name of the new Emperor Masayuki, they would declare the end of the war and establish the Tripartite Alliance.

In this way, a framework different from that of the Western States Council would be created.

Dwargon’s role was to rebuild the area near the border together with the Empire, including the roads and buildings in the vicinity. To a lesser extent, this also included providing relief to the victims involved in the war.

Trust would come after trust was earned.

With that momentum, the construction of the railroad to the Imperial Capital would begin. We decided to accomplish this difficult task while rebuilding the road that the Magic Tank Division of the Empire had cut in the foothills of the Canaat Mountains.

A team of leaders from our country would also be dispatched to work with the dwarf engineers to complete the project.

When the ‘Magic Train’ came through, logistics would be streamlined, and people would be able to come and go as they pleased. We would be entering into a new era of development.

When I dream of that day, I can’t stop from feeling excited. Once again, I confirmed my preference to make constructive plans.

So, what are the roles of our Jura Tempest Federation?

Our main responsibility was to provide full support to Masayuki.

We would send Testarossa to set up an embassy in the Empire. The goal was to dispel the old mindset of the empire and make it feel as if a new era had arrived.

The subjects of the Empire had never been defeated in war before. They had never apologized to another nation for their mistakes, even when they were hurt by Veldora.

Perhaps this speaks to Rudra’s greatness, but that was also a reason why the subjects of the Empire might not be able to accept this defeat.

Those who had lost loved ones would understand the pain. However, it was likely that those who were just sitting on their laurels at home would demand another war from a safe position.

They would focus only on the benefits to be gained and be insensitive to the pain of others.

It is highly likely that they would not be pleased with Masayuki’s opposition to war. With Velgrynd around, there was no point in directly interfering, but…they might interfere behind the scenes while showing reverence on the outside, which would be a very troublesome thing.

It was up to Minits to persuade the nobles, and Calgurio would be in charge of the military. However, I was worried that the two of them were not strong enough to deal with the cunning old underbelly of society.

Velgrynd had casually suggested, “Why don’t I just kill them all?” but we could not let her do such a thing. In an empire of dwindling talent, there was no way they could afford to reduce the number of human resources any further.

We would have to use such troublesome people to our advantage. The road ahead was a difficult, thorny path, but I had come to the conclusion in the last few days that we had no choice but to try.

That is where Testarossa comes in.

With the help of Moss, our agent with a hell of an ear, we could sweep away the schemes of the malicious in one fell swoop. Even those who are troublesome when swarmed together may become cooperative if we threate—er, no, persuade them by grasping their individual weaknesses.

The Western States Council was now settled to the point where Cien alone could handle it, so it was decided that Testarossa would be transferred.

It was also decided that Venom would continue to accompany Masayuki as his bodyguard.

“I’ll be borrowing some of your family members, is that okay?”

“Kufufufu, no problem. If it is for the good of Rimuru-sama, please do not hesitate to use them.”

I had nothing to say about this. As for Diablo, it was too tiring to dig into it.

\*

After the problems that the Imperial side had put together were disclosed, everyone discussed them to come up with countermeasures.

It was a very meaningful time.

“We, as members of the Empire, will never forget the kindness you have shown us.”

“Hey now, we are still in the planning stages. We’re just starting to make things happen. If you want to thank me, wait until the project is completed.”

“Hahaha, the project, huh? I’m no match for Your Majesty Rimuru…that this national challenge can be described in one word.”

Minits-san was smiling.

But there was a gleam in his eyes, and my words seemed to have ignited his will to fight.

I’m glad that he was motivated.

In this way, we reached an agreement on the plan, but there was still a problem that we should not forget.

It was Gazel who mentioned it.

“So, Rimuru. Let me ask you the most important question. Can you win?”

It was true…Michael and Feldway, and their men…there was a threatening enemy out there, watching us with an eagle eye.

“Honestly, I can’t guarantee that I’m going to win, but I’m definitely not going to lose.”

“Well, it’s you after all, so no matter what method is used, I’m sure you’ll do whatever it takes to turn those words into something real.”

“Even overestimated.”

“Hmph! To be honest, when I saw Velgrynd-sama’s strength, I was prepared for defeat and death. I knew she was strong, but I didn’t expect her to be that powerful.”

Vaughn and Dolph-san nodded in agreement at Gazel’s frank confession.

Well, I thought it was over too when I saw Testarossa and the others collapse.

After that, because I was so angry, I got over my fear—or rather, I felt like it was over before I realized it, and thinking back on it now, I wonder how I even managed to win.

But well, I have Ciel now.

And Veldora and Diablo and the others.

It was reassuring to know that I’m not alone.

“I never thought I’d lose to a slime either, but now I’m grateful. I don’t think that even Velzard-nee can beat Rimuru.”

Velgrynd, not offended by Gazel’s words, said this quite matter-of-factly.

I doubted that I could defeat Velzard-san, who had beaten Veldora one-sidedly, but I was pretty sure that Velgrynd was speaking from the heart.

“I’m also embarrassed by your high opinion of me.”

“Don’t be modest. Your victory over me was not by luck, but by sheer strength. Moreover, you won overwhelmingly, so what are you talking about?”

Velgrynd was not ashamed of her defeat, because it was in the past for her. I think she had overcome it now and accepted it honestly.

It was people like that who scared me the most, and I secretly raised my alert level on Velgrynd.

From here, it was time to talk seriously about my own thoughts.

“The reality is that we don’t know what the enemy’s true strength is, and we cannot predict how they’ll react. Regardless of their purpose, I’m curious about their aim, or rather, what kind of methods they will use.”

As I said this, I projected several people onto a giant screen.

“These are the enemies that invaded the labyrinth this time. Their existence values are roughly equivalent to three million, which is a high level of strength even compared to the leaders of our country. They’re such a nasty opponent that I think it’s best to avoid fighting them one-on-one.”

After I said that, I disclosed all of the information I knew.

Then, as if to add to my story, Velgrynd said.

“I eliminated this one, but I have a word of advice. These people are the ones who used to help Brother Veldanava in ancient times, and they are as nasty as the primordials. Their bodies are currently still sealed, and all those who appeared in the labyrinth were just a weakened ‘Split Body.’ They can’t be defeated by ordinary means, so you’d better be on your guard.”

Hearing that put one at a loss for words.

Because Velgrynd, the one who said such a thing, had already destroyed one of them so easily.

«That is the effect of the ‘Dimension Leap’ in Velgrynd’s power. Velgrynd herself can only leap towards the mark of Rudra’s soul fragment, but she should have no problems firing her technique towards the mark.»

I see…

In other words, Velgrynd traced the connection between Cornu’s ‘Split Body’ and his main body, and destroyed both of them together.

«That’s right. If it is a ‘Spacetime Continuous Attack’ that can transcend time and space, then there is no way to escape it, even if the being is a ‘Parallel Existence.’»

Seriously, that’s messed up.

I mean, Velgrynd was just too good. I didn’t know how much experience she had accumulated, but she was now perfectly in control of her own powers.

She was already powerful before, but now she had become even stronger.

Veldora was so happy to learn ‘Parallel Existence,’ but this turned out to be completely pointless. I wonder if Veldora knew about this…I felt a little sorry for him.

I wasn’t the only one who didn’t know how to react.

The Imperials and Gazel’s group were also pondering carefully over Velgrynd’s words.

The Empire still had a trump card with Velgrynd. They could rely on her, but the problem was Dwargon.

“We can’t win, huh?”

“That’s right. Unfortunately, there’s nothing we can do.”

“Vaughn!”

“But it’s true. There’s no point in trying to look good, so why don’t we just have an honest discussion and think about countermeasures?”

“Uh, no, you’re right, but…but…”

“Vaughn is right. We can’t win against them anyway, but we should still have a plan for when we do encounter them. So, Your Majesty Rimuru, based on the goals of you, Michael, and the Phantom King, do you think Dwargon will also be involved?”

Hmm, it’s unlikely, right?

“It probably doesn’t matter. It’s not that it’s safe, it’s just that it’s a lower a priority.”

“Hmm. So because the enemy’s goal is to resurrect their God Veldanava, they don’t care about Dwargon anyway, correct?”

“I don’t mean to be rude, but I suppose.”

“It’s okay. As a warrior, I am unhappy, but as a king, I am relieved.”

Gazel finished and smiled bitterly.

“So, by that measure, is the enemy serious?”

“Kufufufufu. Do they think that by harnessing the power of Veldora-sama and Velzard-sama, the resurrection of Veldanava-sama will be accomplished? All I can say is that it’s a stupid idea.”

“In the first place, Veldanava-sama is immortal. To resurrect him through human power is beyond foolishness.”

Diablo scoffed, and Benimaru was indignant.

It is a mystery as to why Veldanava has not been resurrected, but it is still true that the True Dragon race is immortal. I also agreed with the opinion that we should just leave it alone, left unspeakable.

“But if that’s the case, won’t the Dragon Princess be targeted as well?”

Calgurio pointed out sharply.

Indeed, Milim had inherited Veldanava’s power, so it would not be surprising if she was targeted.

This question was answered by Velgrynd.

“That possibility cannot be denied, but to mess with my brother’s beloved would be to put the cart before the horse. It’s possible for them to simply want to take his power, but if they sincerely wish for his resurrection, then I’d like to think they wouldn’t do anything that would offend him.”

Well, Milim was strong, and she didn’t seem to have an Ultimate Skill of the Angelic System. Plus with Karion-san and Frey-san having awakened, I didn’t think we would need to worry too much about her.

Since Velgrynd thought things were okay, it would probably be enough just to warn them.

However, there was something else that bothered me.

“In that way, doesn’t it sound like Veldanava was unconcerned about his siblings?”

“You’re pretty rude.”

Velgrynd looked at me, seemingly more speechless than annoyed.

“Uh, I’m sorry. I’m an honest person, so I just…”

“Well, it’s fine.”

Lucky.

Velgrynd’s generosity saved my life.

I would reflect on this and be careful on what I said in the future.

“It doesn’t matter. A True Dragon thinks differently than the rest of those who have an end in sight. The same goes for Velzard-nee, who has destroyed Veldora over and over again in the name of education. So, perhaps they are planning to wait for the resurrection of Brother Veldanava before releasing our power.”

Yes, that made sense.

They think he’ll be resurrected after he’s eaten, just like I did.

In doing so, the memories would be inherited, so whether or not the personality would change was simply not a matter of concern.

“In other words, Milim-sama is not indestructible because she is not a True Dragon species. If you kill Milim-sama, you will incur the wrath of the resurrected Veldanava-sama.”

Testarossa summed up what Velgrynd had said. Perhaps, I think that’s the right way to look at it.

“All right, then, let’s just warn Milim, too.”

I said as such, and Velgrynd nodded.

Then she turned to Masayuki, who was sitting next to her.

“You look like someone else, but…Masayuki, you’re definitely a target, so you have to be very careful, okay?”

“Eh?! They’re not giving up yet?”

“Your Majesty…Unlike here in the labyrinth, you can’t come back from the dead in the Empire! You must be more aware of this and take better care of yourself.”

“We will do everything in our power to protect Your Majesty, but the other party is still our opponent. Your Majesty yourself must be more aware of this.”

“O-Okay…uh, I mean, I understand.”

Masayuki’s lame-ass reply brought the afternoon’s discussions to an end.