

## Prologue

### The Golden Melancholy

It was a pure white mansion. There were blossoming flowers of all kinds in the garden. A young girl smiled as a young boy observed her.

That was a happy time in the past, and the memory of it hadn't faded one bit. His one goal in life had been to retrieve such happiness. Yet, it was a task harder than traveling to the moon.

The mansion—the golden city that he had built. There was also a beautiful garden, like a paradise in heaven. It was far more luxurious and grandiose than the one in his memory. Yet the most important aspect, the key to his memory just somehow couldn't be found.

Even after he had become a force to be reckoned with in this world, he was unable to find his beloved young girl. And without her, he could never find his smile.

All of this had been prepared for his beloved young girl.

His name was Leon Cromwell. One of the demon lords, known as the “Platinum Saber.” And the girl that Demon Lord Leon was seeking was—

This was the kingdom that Leon ruled—the Golden Valley El Dorado. The royal castle, in the shape of a spiral, towered at the center of the kingdom. The location was the meeting hall of the royal castle.

Leon exuded an air of majesty on his throne as three suspicious individuals kneeled before him. They were garbed in all black and adorned with rain hats, a rather bizarre look. Their outfit looked the same as that of the weapon merchant Damrada. It went without saying that this was Laplace's party.

“—You again. Isn't this the second time?”

“Yes. To have the honor of being recognized by His Majesty Demon Lord Leon, we are most grateful. However, we regret to inform you that we will be suspending the transaction of the confidential merchandise this time.”

It was Teare who answered Leon in a rather serious tone. It was an attempt to make them seem more appealing by letting the female Teare do the negotiating.

This was also going to be their last engagement. They had decided to follow Yuuki's plan and pause all activities in the Western Nations.

Misha of the 'Cerberus' organization would continue to act as a correspondent to the Rosso family. While they proceeded with their prior transactions, Yuuki's party would move their headquarters to the Eastern Empire.

In addition, losing Mariabell also greatly reduced the Rosso's strength.

In truth, the supplier of their top-secret merchandise was the kingdom of Siltrosso, and right now the Rosso family didn't possess enough power to conduct any more summonings.

Moreover, now that Tempest had joined the Western States Council, the Western Nations would be under the influence of Demon Lord Rimuru. Their surveillance would be tighter than ever.

Laplace and the others all agreed that it was time to leave.

“Ho, that's quite bold of you. Unlike Damrada, you wish to raise the price with me so soon?”

“No no no, you have misunderstood. As His Majesty Leon is probably aware, Demon Lord Rimuru has cemented his place in the Western Nations. He's rather displeased with the summoning of otherworlders and strictly forbids it. We believe that it wouldn't be easy to continue the trade under these circumstances,” Teare answered smoothly.

Hearing this, Leon thought to himself—as *I suspected*.

He had sent some of his men to blend in within the Western Nations, and they reported the same things. Leon himself thought that things would develop in that direction sooner or later.

Honestly, there was too much uncertainty with this method. The rate of success was astronomically low. It was an approach that was unlikely to work from the start.

After all, this was about summoning a specific individual to this world—

He had ordered his subordinates to do the summoning countless times. It took more than thirty summoners working together in the span of seven days of rituals with detailed procedures to do the summoning to Leon's specific criteria.

Yet the rate of success was less than one percent. Moreover, it would take some time for the same person to conduct the summoning ritual again, and the number of times a person could attempt the ritual was also limited.

From the start, the rate of success was close to zero.

Even Leon himself had conducted many summons, yet they all ended in failure. His last summon called upon Shizue Izawa, and tomorrow, it would be sixty-six years since she was summoned. If he wanted to narrow down the conditions into the summoning rituals, the interval between summons would be even longer.

The next summon was not worth looking forward to, either. That was why he devised the 'Incomplete Summoning' rituals. It was a young girl that Leon was looking for. That was why the incomplete summon, which had a higher chance of summoning children, should raise his rate of success, even though it would be barely noticeable in the grand scheme of things.

He planned to spread the method among the Western Nations, thereby increasing the chance of success by raising the number of summons attempted and thus gathering more children...

—Yet to this day, it had been a complete failure.

There was no other way, and he could not think of any other alternatives.

That anxious uneasiness weighed heavily on his heart. Regardless, Leon spoke in his usual cold monotone: “—Rimuru you say? We have not signed an agreement nor asked for any aid. But in the end, he became the hindrance. Still, that's something that can't be helped. However, what did you mean by our trade will be suspended? Even if the West has fallen, wouldn't the East still be operating?”

Leon's sonorous voice echoed in the meeting hall. There was an intense pressure in his voice. Teare couldn't help but feel numb after being hit by his voice head-on.

They were on different levels.

A half-baked majin would have problems just standing still in front of a demon lord. Even for someone as strong as Teare, it was difficult to deal with Leon.

She was not alone here, however.

“Allow me to explain,” Laplace interjected. “Things are heating up in the East, actually. They seem to be secretly preparing for war, so their mages are quite occupied. That's why it's not as easy to gather people needed for conducting rituals.”

Leon squinted at Laplace after listening to what he had to say.

*How annoying*, he thought to himself.

He didn't care about what happened between the Western Nations and the Eastern Empire; but if the war were to be lengthy, it would impact Leon's goals. If this were to be the case, he would need to re-examine his plans.

With that being said, these thoughts were all in Leon's head. He was still sitting on his throne with a cold expression, silently glaring at Laplace.

His gaze made Laplace rather uncomfortable.

*This guy is definitely a pain in the ass to deal with. He's nothing like the fake demon lord I killed. The real deal really is different, no? Just like Boss said, it's not gonna be easy to seek revenge against this guy directly...*

Due to Yuuki's orders, they had been keeping a low profile. So even with the person who killed Kazalim standing in front of him, Laplace didn't have the slightest intention to take on Demon Lord Leon. He was doing so to live up to Yuuki's trust. He wanted to do his job well.

But, even if that were to be the case—with their archnemesis in front him, he could still try to measure his strength and find his weaknesses. Even in Laplace's eyes, Demon Lord Leon was a monster. If he were to battle against him seriously... There was no telling who would come out on top. Perhaps he would win,

perhaps he would lose. Even if the trio of Teare, Footman, and Laplace were to cooperate in challenging him, the winner would still be up for debate.

That was why Laplace had been entrusted with the job this time to try and negotiate with Leon. He had also guessed Yuuki's intentions for letting them handle this task.

*Boss wanted us to take a look at this man. It's important to learn about our enemies. Like with that Mariabell, Boss would've had a hard time fighting her straight on. Demon Lord Rimuru is a monster beyond belief, that's why Mariabell failed. That being said, it's impossible to see how strong Demon Lord Rimuru is.*

Mariabell failed because she misjudged Rimuru's strength. In the first place, it was a miscalculation of Mariabell, who was better at scheming, to have attacked directly. This was not just Laplace's analysis, but Yuuki and Kagali's as well.

What Mariabell was thinking—what she was afraid of—was that the longer she waited, the more disadvantageous the situation would have been for her. That was why she decided to place her bets on a high-stake gamble. It was something an outsider such as Yuuki could not have predicted.

Moreover—

The culprit that led Mariabell's thoughts in that direction, now that there's no need to hide the truth, was Yuuki himself. Indeed, Mariabell believed too much in her power, but it was Yuuki who intentionally designed it so that Mariabell believed she could defeat Demon Lord Rimuru. In addition, he had mixed in false information to disrupt Mariabell's plan.

Yuuki wasn't sure that Mariabell would have lost, either. His goal was to let the strong fight among themselves so that he may observe and confirm their strengths. In the end, Demon Lord Rimuru emerged victorious.

Mariabell, who even Yuuki thought was difficult to deal with, was dead. And her source of power—Unique Skill 'Greed'—also recognized Yuuki as its new master.

That had been Yuuki's true goal. Laplace was shocked after hearing about this. You couldn't just rob someone else's Skill; but according to Yuuki, he had thought that he might be able to.

*How reckless. Mariabell sure was unlucky. Her opponent was our Boss, after all. She was too naive and too confident in her skills. The power of information definitely is amazing. This goes with Leon as well. That's why even though I'm furious, I shouldn't take this guy on when I don't have a good shot at winning. That's the smart thing to do,* Laplace concluded.

Suspension of all engagement and focusing on expanding their influence as well as gathering intel—this plan remained the same. Now that Yuuki had achieved his goal, there was no reason for them to stay in the Western Nations.

This was the reason why they wished to avoid provoking Leon and instead proposed to suspend their trade.

It was no use yielding before Leon's intimidation. Laplace decided to finish his sentence.

"We are not saying that there will be no more dealings from now on. When we can conduct summoning rituals once more, we shall contact you, but please be patient until then. Furthermore, our information network spans the whole world. If there were to be any stray otherworlder children, could you permit us to take care of them first?"

"—That can't be helped then. I'll let you handle that. But I have one question."

"What's that?"

"Why is your tongue so loose?"

"Eh?" Laplace replied with confusion, confronted by Leon's question.

He was calling him loose-tongued, yet Laplace didn't even know what he said wrong.

*What did I let slip? Never mind that—if he wants to pick a fight, we'll give him a fight all right.*

Laplace wasn't nervous in the slightest. You gotta enjoy every situation you were in, or else you'd be a sore loser. Even if he failed, it was fine. He would just see what to do later on.

He hid his killing intent and quickly made his resolve. Yet Leon followed up, ignoring Laplace's conundrum: "Is it really fine for merchants who are sensitive to profits to reveal something as important as war so casually? If this were the previous handler Damrada, surely he wouldn't have done something so foolish."

"T-that's..."

Now that he pointed it out, even Laplace thought he had a point; but Yuuki had ordered him to say this to decline Leon. Moreover, Yuuki had revealed other information to him. Now that Laplace recalled it, he began to connect the dots.

What Leon would probably say next was—

"Are you trying to hide something? You seemed to want to keep my focus on the war. In case you haven't noticed, that's a foolishly naive thought," he threw his doubt at Laplace.

*We've seen through everything.* Laplace finally regained his cool, but also felt annoyed at the same time.

*Seriously, Boss has got me totally beat. He's even foreseen how things would develop here.*

Leon overanalyzed Laplace's words and twisted his meaning, thinking that he was hiding something. It was because the demon lord knew the great value of information that he misunderstood, thinking this was all Laplace's tactic to distract Leon from other goals.

That wasn't the case at all in reality.

Laplace and his companions were merely following Yuuki's orders. They didn't put much thought to it, but it wouldn't be helpful to tell the truth now. Leon would probably think that he was just making up excuses. This was all part of Yuuki's cleverly crafted plans. In other words, there were great schemes behind what he had done.

Naturally, Laplace needed to give a hint regarding their ace in the hole.

"How impressive, as expected from Demon Lord Leon-sama. Actually, this would be the last of the top-secret merchandise. There were five more. The children who were taken in by Shizue Izawa, to be more specific."

"—Umm."

Yuuki wanted to leak the information about the children under Rimuru's protection from the start. However, it would have raised Leon's suspicion about their devious intent if they told him directly. Therefore, Yuuki had reminded Laplace time and time again that he should only bring up the children at the end.

Depending on how the negotiation went, there was no telling how things would develop. Yet Yuuki saw through all of this with ease, which was why he was so terrifying.

Apart from feeling terrified, Laplace continued to say the words he had been ordered to relay to Leon.

"There were three boys and two girls. They were all otherworlders as ya'd ordered. But therein lies the problem: We can't get them out."

"Shizue Izawa... Shizu, huh? In that case, they are in Tempest?"

"Yes. It's a real pity. We're merchants too, so we don't want to get ourselves in trouble. By the way, the children's names were—"

"Ken Misuru, Ryozeke, Gail Gibbs, Alison, Kroba Hale."

The one who spoke in Laplace's place while he was trying to recall the names was Footman, who had stayed quiet until now. The others figured that Footman wasn't the best communicator, so they only let him memorize the names of the children.

"Right, right. But since the merchandise can't be obtained, surely Demon Lord Leon wouldn't have any interest either," Laplace uttered with a smile.

Yet Leon still scowled.

"Your pronunciation made it really hard to tell. Are you sure it is Kroba and not Chloe?"

Footman remained silent even though Leon asked in a rather annoyed tone. If he were to respond without thinking, Leon would probably be so infuriated as to pick a fight with him. Footman, by virtue of being here

with his group, was putting everyone else in danger. It was the right choice to have had him remain silent; otherwise, Footman would, no doubt, have only further aggravated Leon.

Teare apologized in his place.

“Please forgive us, His Majesty Demon Lord Leon. The names of the otherworlders don’t translate well in our tongue. As a result, our pronunciations are not very accurate. Also, we heard that you didn’t particularly care about the names of the travelers. We truly apologize.” Teare bowed after apologizing. Laplace and Footman also bowed dramatically to apologize.

“Indeed, names do not matter. It is your miscalculation that the merchandise was taken, but it didn’t violate our contracts. The information about the upcoming war would suffice as your apology, I shall accept it.”

Leon swallowed his emotions and announced with his usual attitude.

And with that, the meeting concluded.

Laplace and the others took the payment for the merchandise and safely left El Dorado.

“All right, what to do next...” Leon muttered to himself after Laplace’s party had departed.

The long hair by Leon’s nape gathered neatly together as if it had woven itself into a single brilliant strand of golden light. In sharp contrast to the radiance, his long and slanted eyes were a shade of melancholy.

A knight stood ramrod straight next to Leon. He was the silver knight Alrose, one of Leon’s top lieutenants, as well as the person he would often confide in.

“Should I eliminate those people just now? How dare they displease Leon-sama like that. I think there is no value in having them live.”

Umm—that was the sound that Leon made as he was pondering Alrose’s words.

Compared to their predecessor Damrada, those three were more than just suspicious. It was questionable whether they were really merchants at all. Frankly, Leon never trusted merchants from the start. He simply wanted to avoid antagonizing the secret organization ‘Cerberus.’

Leon’s subordinates had integrated into human society as well, but they were nowhere near this enormous organization based in the ‘East’ that had even exerted influence on the ‘West.’

*We should use them while they are still exploitable*—Leon judged calmly.

Especially with the ordeal of finding ‘Otherworlders,’ as opposed to having monsters searching for them, it was more appropriate to have humans handle the work. In order to achieve his goal, assistance from humans was necessary.

“Let them be. More importantly, the problem lies with the information those guys just leaked. If the Eastern Empire really were on the move, it would lead to a real world war. I’m not sure what the other demon lords would do, but if the world went to chaos, there is no way that we would not be affected.”

“It is as you say,” Alrose affirmed in agreement. “El Dorado is under Leon-sama’s protection, but other places may be subjected to the massive scale of war. We must arrange preparations for it.”

Leon’s ruled territory, El Dorado, lay on a different continent across the sea. This continent was larger than the country of Australia on Earth. All of it was under Leon’s rule.

There was a large active volcano in the center that erupted all year round. Yet the volcanic dust was blown away by magic-controlled wind and never once fell over the beautiful capital city. There were also all sorts of ore deposits near the volcano that could be processed into valuable magical metals. In addition, the high yield of gold made it possible for Leon to conduct secret trade with humans.

The city was extremely prosperous. The kingdom was protected by magic. This was the golden valley of El Dorado under Leon’s rule.

There was no way that this prosperous kingdom would be affected and subjected to the ugly wars of humans—this probably was not just Alrose’s wish, but the wishes of all of Leon’s subjects.

“Then we should cast defensive magic for emergency use; enter a high alert state.”

“Very well, we should do just that. But it is beyond my control.”

“...? What is?”

“The war. If many were to die, it may bring those troublesome creatures to the world. I recall that the Yellow Primordial slumbers within this land. But it probably wouldn’t be enough to grant it a new body...”

Leon was truly annoyed by the idiocy that was being committed. He had no idea what the Eastern Empire was planning, but death always accompanied war. If large amounts of blood were spilled, the seas of blood would awaken monsters. It may just cause those dangerous demons to be awakened and rain catastrophe upon mankind.

Leon had a very special standing in all this as an ex-Hero. To him, such a move was extremely foolish. However—

Now that he had become a demon lord, he simply felt that it was rather saddening. Even though he pitied the humans outside, it wouldn’t really hurt him, regardless of what would happen to these outsiders.

Leon had only one thing on his mind. He feared about the possibility that the girl he was finding might be harmed by this whole ordeal.

“We shall let them witness our strength by that time!”

“Very well. I look forward to your performance. In addition—”

“Allow me to send members of the Blue Knight Order to his kingdom.”

Leon nodded steadily to Alrose.

There was no need to give orders in detail, Alrose knew what he meant and had put it into action.

“I’ll leave it to you,” Leon declared, then calmly closed his eyes—

As his subordinate left, the meeting hall fell back into silence.

Leon’s slanted eyes opened and gazed into the empty space.

—*Speaking of which, did he just say Kroba Hale? I shouldn’t expect much, but is it seriously that similar? Perhaps it’s a trap.*

No, it didn’t matter if it was a trap or not.

Demon Lord Leon’s primary goal was to find her, after all, that girl. His playmate when Leon was a kid, the girl that he was supposed to protect—

—Her name was Chloe Aubert.

## Chapter 1

### Observation and Research Results

In the corner of a luxurious villa, a group of strange men were resting on sofas surrounding a table. This was one of the western bases of the secret organization known as ‘Cerberus.’ The villa was owned by one of its leaders—Misha the Lover. Her personal maid served tea for everyone before bowing and promptly left the room.

And so, the meeting began.

“I see, it appears that everything has been going smoothly,” Yuuki Kagurazaka said happily after hearing the report.

“Everything was just like the boss predicted! I was starting to suspect that Laplace had failed.”

“Hehehe, Laplace is always cautious. But he’s not good with negotiations.”

“Eh, hold on. I’m way better at that than ya guys!”

Teare and Footman were tacit under these circumstances, to which Laplace voiced his complaint. It wasn’t actual complaining, but more like friendly banter between close friends.

“Don’t be mad; it’s not that bad. I’m glad about the fact that you were all able to hold back when facing Leon,” Kagali admitted.

“Right. To be fair, I also prepared a mental note for myself in case you guys did lose control,” added Yuuki, smirking as he finished.

If that were to really happen, they would need to see how things developed. At most, they would only lose a way to communicate with Demon Lord Leon. Now that they’ve decided to no longer operate among the Western Nations, it was no longer that big an issue.

“Yer truly ruthless. By the way, did ya have something planned when ya let me tell Leon about the kids?” Laplace asked, sounding resigned.

“No, there was nothing too significant behind that. To be honest, Leon’s goal of gathering these incomplete summons was probably to expand his military force. On the other hand, I *am* concerned about whether or not he has some other intention,” Yuuki replied with a wry smile on his face.

“So that’s why you revealed the truth and told him about the five children under Demon Lord Rimuru’s protection...”

“There’s more to it than that. After all, what Leon did with those children is only based on our assumptions. By design, incomplete summons—children—would inevitably die. Demon Lord Rimuru saved those kids and granted them the power of spirits. Leon didn’t know about it. I’m more interested in what that guy will do now that he’s learned about the existence of those children who are supposed to die soon.”

“I see. That is certainly intriguing. We can see the reason behind Leon’s actions by simply observing his reaction.”

“That’s true. After all, there haven’t been that many clues, so we need a stimulant of some kind.”

“Don’t we now? But for the most part, I just did it out of curiosity. I’m always very mindful of details.”

After listening to Yuuki’s explanation, Kagali and Laplace both understood what he meant. Indeed, perhaps just as Yuuki said, this was him erring on the side of caution. He wanted to explore Leon’s intentions, but more importantly, the deliberate leaking of information had some significant meaning behind it.

What if Demon Lord Leon decided to take action?

Leon wouldn’t go to war with Rimuru for the sake of adding a mere five soldiers. The risk of antagonizing Rimuru far outweighed the benefits of his attempt at increasing military strength. Leon wasn’t stupid enough that he’d fail to realize this.

Under normal circumstances, he would write off the loss of those kids, but if Leon took actions regardless of the cost—

Then they could come to the definite conclusion: Leon had some other motive.

“But—they’re just a couple of kids. I don’t think Demon Lord Leon will take any action,” Kagali remarked.

Laplace frowned. “Seriously? We even had to leak information about the war just so we could mention those kids. My nerves were killing me after he became suspicious. It took a lot of effort to work that out.”

Things would undoubtedly get interesting if Leon were to respond. But the probability of that happening was very low.

Both Kagali and Laplace felt that Yuuki’s idea, while intriguing, would eventually fail.

Seeing his companions’ reaction, Yuuki could only reply with a wry smile. “I told you guys it’s my fault. If you guys didn’t go in that direction, revealing the children’s information would just seem unnatural. Also, if you revealed it from the start, with your acting skills...”

Yuuki tried to play dumb.

He didn’t plan on finishing his sentence. Laplace and the others knew all too well themselves with what he wanted to say.

Teare put it plainly for everyone. “While regretful, it’s something that can’t be helped. Footman’s not good with making speeches, nor is his temper. Laplace’s arrogance makes him suspicious. And since I was on my own, I couldn’t pull it off without making any mistakes, no matter how hard I tried.”

Laplace was left dumbfounded whereas Footman looked all pissed off. It was a pretty common sight. But to their surprise, Teare followed up on her words as if she had come up with something at the last minute.

“Boss, you can call me paranoid, but there’s something bugging me.”

“Oh—what is it?”

“Here’s the thing. When Footman was reciting the names of the merchandise, Leon—”

“What did Leon do?”

“He kept asking about the names afterward. When Footman mentioned ‘Kroba Hale,’ Leon asked back ‘Are you sure it is Kroba, not Chloe?’ even though he said it himself that the names didn’t matter. That was the only reason why we weren’t careful about names.”

“That man looked a bit sensitive; no doubt he cares about little details like that.”

“Hehehe, that guy was really pissing me off. He was probably making fun of me for my pronunciation.”

Laplace and Footman’s feedback was just complaints.

But Yuuki and Kagali glanced at each other.

“What do you think?” Yuuki questioned.

“If he actually wasn’t interested, then surely he wouldn’t have such a reaction,” answered Kagali.

“But... No no no, it can’t be... Can there really be a coincidence like that?”

“If there are things such as causality, we can’t say for certain that ‘there is absolutely no coincidence’...”

“Now that you mention it, it may just be...”

“Yes, Demon Lord Leon’s goal is most likely that kid named Chloe.”

“It can’t be.”

Yuuki was shocked. If they were somehow right about Chloe, then they just accidentally threw away a trump card against Demon Lord Leon.

Kagali was more frustrated than Yuuki.

And if that honestly were the case, then maybe they wouldn’t have lost Clayman—she was infuriated by this knowledge.

“Eh, EH!”

Seeing that her words had inspired such an unexpected possibility, even Teare couldn’t hide her surprise. If their hypothesis turned out to be true—reality seemed all too cruel and unfair for them.

“Oi oi, were ya’ll joking just now?”

“Are you both serious about what you said?”

Laplace and Footman were both taken aback. Yuuki and Kagali were indeed good at strategizing, but it wasn’t like they were able to foresee everything. Failure didn’t matter; they would always come up with a second or third backup plan. They could always calm down and develop a scheme to handle any situation. Laplace knew this all too well, but he genuinely thought the two were stressing too much this time. Footman nodded heavily as well, seemingly in agreement.

“Regardless, there is still the chance we may be wrong. We can’t ignore the possibility at this point, but we also can’t say if we’re correct for sure,” Yuuki admitted.

“I suppose what Boss did out of curiosity paid off after all!” cheered Teare.

“No no no, this is no ordinary pay off. This could prove to be a huge bomb shell,” speculated Laplace.

Kagali thought to herself for a bit. “You have a point. Although I won’t put too much hope in it, it will certainly be interesting if that’s how things really turn out. We can utilize this to our advantage if things progress well and let the more difficult demon lords fight among themselves. Perhaps it will help us with our revenge too.”

Teare voiced her opinion. “Umm, it doesn’t matter which side wins in the end. Right, we’ll just treat this as more playtime.”

“Hehehe, I still think you guys are just worrying too much, but it’s of no loss to us,” Footman reassured.

“Anyway, just don’t get ya hopes up. Things probably won’t go that easily after all.”

Realizing that everyone was cutting Yuuki some slack, Laplace reminded the folks to have some reservations. They were all aware of this, and the conversation came to an end.

It was then that Misha had the maid refill everyone’s tea.

“By the way, how are things going on Boss’s side?” Laplace asked after drinking his tea.

In response, Yuuki took a sip of black tea from his cup and nodded to Laplace. “I’m still a bit mindful of the whole thing with Chloe, but I think I will analyze it carefully later. Let’s cut to the chase now.”

A smile broke on his face as he started to recall what he had been up to. While Laplace and the others were busy confronting Demon Lord Leon, Yuuki was in the midst of a major engagement.

Their contact was some ruler behind the scenes of the Western Nations.

They were negotiating about how to deal with the aftermath of the mess created by Mariabell.

“As you all know by now, I was acting as if I were manipulated by Mariabell. So naturally, she took the fall entirely afterward.”

“Was that the thing Boss had to deal with?”

“That’s right. Since I was being ‘controlled,’ there was no way I could just run off to the Eastern Empire.”

“Well, you have a point.”

“That’s true.”

“Umm, it would definitely be suspicious.”

“By the way, the power of ‘Greed’ was a real gambit when I tried seizing it. But I had the more important goal in mind of killing Mariabell. With her out of the picture, it wouldn’t seem strange if I roamed freely now. Apart from solidifying my position, I also got to negotiate directly with the Great Elder Granbell of the Rosso family.”

Indeed, Yuuki’s goal had been Mariabell.

In order to avoid completely losing his foothold in the Western Nations, he had to deceive Mariabell. The fruits of his labor led to the chaos that happened some time ago.

With Mariabell taken care of, Yuuki was free once again. Even the worst of his misdeeds were ultimately pushed onto Mariabell’s plate. He simply claimed that they were her orders.

Things were going the way that Yuuki had planned. Mariabell had lost, and Yuuki gained even greater power. He also successfully negotiated with Granbell. There was something interesting that he heard during their discussion, which was the reason why he gathered everyone today.

“Then, let me get to the conclusion first. There is one more job we need to finish before heading east.”

Everyone seemed to be stunned at the news. Glancing around at his audience, Yuuki switched to a more serious expression.

“Listen up now. I’m going to explain this in detail from the start.”

After he finished, Yuuki began sharing the contents of his meeting with Granbell.

*How peaceful.*

I’ve been busy every day now that I returned to the capital of Tempest, or more commonly known as ‘Rimuru.’

I knew for sure that Mariabell was dead.

When the dust had settled, I ordered people to head down the ruins and investigate, yet no body or items of value were found.

She probably died from the explosion when she self-detonated that engine reactor like Yuuki claimed, or maybe it was all smoke and mirrors.

Regardless, every problem had been resolved regarding the issue.

Mariabell was the princess of the Kingdom of Siltrosso. The princess attacked us in the ruins—if we were to publicly announce this bit of news, it would only make matters worse. That was why we secretly contacted the Kingdom of Siltrosso and regarded the matter as an “accident” that unfortunately occurred.

The fact that we were able to negotiate at all was because neither country wanted the incident to be in the public eye. We were both well aware of the ramifications, hence the open cooperation. There were always plenty of “accidents” when it came to royalty with deep, historical roots. We quickly reached an agreement and did not escalate further conflict.

Their king and queen appeared to be very cruel and ruthless.

With parents like that, it was no wonder Mariabell wanted to rely on knowledge from her previous life.

*If she had the chance to happily live out a brand-new life as a naive child, would she have turned out any differently?* With that being said, that was just an afterthought.

Let us check on the Five Great Elders now.

The head of the Five Great Elders, the one that instigated Mariabell, was the leader of the Rosso family, GranbellRosso. I put myself on guard thinking that he would be plotting something, but it was surprisingly

not the case. I suppose that was the right move. It would've been a public acknowledgement of their illegal doings had he acted in some way. As long as we also stay quiet, they wouldn't be able to do anything.

In fact, more than a month had passed since the incident. Granbell had been completely quiet the entire time.

This brief break still gave us plenty of time.

We effectively utilized information collected by Souei to gain intelligence regarding the underbelly of the Western Nations. We realized that there was no bigger threat than the Rosso family.

For instance, their friendly relationship with the mercenary band 'Apostles of Verte,' but we also discovered several organizations that we had to keep our eyes on. However, it was still unclear as to whether my policies and interests had any direct conflict with them.

Unless they openly declared a hostile attitude towards us, we had no reason to retaliate. I didn't want to stir up trouble myself. For now, we only needed to observe their every move.

Furthermore, we were on good terms with the Freedom Association. We also had the Western Holy Church as our benefactor. It wasn't unreasonable to say that there shouldn't be a single organization out there that would dare to oppose us. As a result, Tempest became the largest faction within the Western Council.

It was now a peaceful early afternoon.

As per usual, we organized a meeting among the executives.

In a short period of time, we had virtually replaced the Five Great Elders. Probably that was why a whole new set of problems suddenly appeared, most likely a direct consequence of their absence.

The Western Council undoubtedly played an important role in directing the decisions of the Western Nations.

Inside the council, the councilors of each nation would cast their vote to decide whether a motion passed or not. The diplomatic weight of a nation's words corresponded to the number of councilors they had. Since we learned about the weaknesses of each nation in the council, our councilor will have to take on the role of mediator.

As our influence on the Western Nations gradually grew, complaints and petitions from other countries inevitably increased.

It was like they were saying "It won't cost you your life just by expressing your opinion," which emboldened people to give us all sorts of requests.

That was why conquering the world was nothing but a fool's errand.

Being a ruler was definitely not easy. It was no wonder why the other demon lords weren't interested in other people's territories at all.

If they accidentally received a tract of impoverished land, they would have to figure out a way to alleviate the local populace's dissatisfaction. Reducing the wealth gap was easy to talk about in theory, but for the person actually handling the mess, it was a difficult job.

Each region's total capital was made up of their inherent resources and labor within. I believed the proper way to resolve the wealth gap issue was to cut down on costs, calculate the resulting profits, and redistribute them.

On the other hand, we needed to be cautious with subsidizing local regions.

If we didn't handle the matter appropriately, it would become a breeding ground for grievances.

Now that our nation was the largest faction in the council, we were expected to behave accordingly. While organizations that opposed us were being contained right now, it was only a matter of time before they began rising up again.

Then there was the problem of who we should send to the council.

This person needed to be socially adept and possess a certain degree of charisma.

But at the same time, when conflicts arose, they also needed to be intimidating enough to keep others from talking back...

“First things first, I want to apologize for having to turn down this task,” I announced.

*After all, the early bird gets the worm.*

It was rare that I considered myself to be devious, but even I didn't want to take the initiative on this hot mess.

Benimaru followed in my footsteps. “Me neither. The last meeting made me realize that my personality is not suited for trying to probe other people. When I am not on the battlefield where my martial prowess can be displayed, I won't be of much use.”

While he sounded too modest, what he said probably was genuine too. Indeed, those sly nobles would be too much of a hassle for Benimaru to handle.

Likewise, Souei also rejected the job. “My duty is to collect information. As the ‘eyes and ears’ of Rimuru-sama, I'm afraid I can't abandon my position right now.”

Well, I somewhat guessed that already. I didn't want to send Souei as well.

Geld wouldn't do either.

Although he had good morals and was a very reliable man, the current work assigned to him was more important.

Due to the large number of construction projects that were lined up, he had no free time on his busy schedule. I figured that Geld would be perfect at handling the councilors, but right now, I definitely had to remove him from the list of potential candidates.

*In that case...*

“W-will you be sending me?”

At that moment, I glanced at the source of the question and saw Gabil, who was attending the meeting with a serious expression on his face.

He's surprisingly self-aware, so he probably wouldn't turn down such an important role.

...No, I should say that I felt pretty uneasy, but I couldn't think of any other suitable candidates.

I already made Hakuro our military advisor and asked him to train our soldiers.

As for Shuna, while having her as our councilor was a possible solution, doing so would doubtlessly have a negative impact on the overall affairs of the country.

Based on the same rationale, I naturally couldn't send Rigurd and the other Goblin chiefs.

As a newborn nation, we needed to draft our laws and negotiate with other governments. There were also other problems such as managing an increasing population. The chiefs would handle these challenges first, but without the support of Shuna and Rigurd, all of these affairs would sadly have to be put on hold.

Even though they were the ones nurturing the next generation, there was always room for improvement and development.

“I-I want to tame the wyverns that were captured and use them as mounts in order to strengthen our air force. This training would require a huge consumption of all sorts of potions, so I still want to continue collecting data...”

Umm—that's right.

As the saying went, ‘the right person for the job,’ I believed that Gabil's talents were a perfect match for what he had suggested.

As opposed to forcing him to attend the council, I would rather have him focus on raising wyvern troops.

“All right. Gabil, you should continue to handle the matter.”

He gave an expression of relief. “Yes sir! Understood!”

It's no good forcing tasks down other people's throats, which was why I thought this was the correct choice.

But even so, the growth of our domain was too fast. It was a bad idea to expand our reach before we've even nurtured our talents, but the number of jobs we had to deal with was increasing at an unstoppable rate.

It was very troubling.

*It can't be helped, I guess. Let's try to think of other alternatives.*

—Just when I was starting to brainstorm.

My gaze suddenly locked onto Shion, who was staring at me with sparkling eyes.

“Rimuru-sama, I—”

“No!”

I immediately cut Shion off.

She was probably trying to toss her hat into the ring, but Shion was definitely not up for discussion.

“Why?!” Shion asked with a surprised look.

*Jeez, I'm the one who's surprised by your reaction.*

“Let's think of a scenario. This is only an example, but let's say you're a councilor. There's a lascivious old man with a big belly in front of you. He's a councilor, too. And then, that old man gently places his hand on your shoulder like he's a very close friend. Now, how will you react?”

“It's obvious. I grab that man's neck with my left hand, lift him up, and punch him without hesitation! I gotta hit him!!”

*'I gotta hit him!' isn't the answer!!*

That's why Shion was out of the question.

Although Shion's growth was an indisputable fact, there were still many parts about her that I couldn't feel relaxed about.

Like what happened a few days ago—

When I went inside the restaurant, Shion was there, looking at me with a huge smile that covered her whole face.

Next, she held out the plate that was in her hands.

“Rimuru-sama, I have been waiting for you. I finally made a cake with my own hands as well! Now, please try it! It tastes exactly like what Shuna-sama makes, but the portions are several times larger. Don't be shy, please eat your fill!!”

What I felt right then was definitely a bad feeling.

But Shion had learned to brew a delicious cup of black tea. Because of that knowledge, I let my guard down.

“O-oh. Thank you. Then let's try it.”

After saying that, I accepted it without much thought.

It was a mistake.

On the plate was a big chunk of what looked like a Konjac.

I suddenly became grave.

*Eh, what cake...?*

After looking at that object, I glanced around for help.

Nobody was there. Did they all run away?

No, Gobichi was lying down in the kitchen. He was definitely a victim.

I realized that I had come in at the worst possible time, but it was already too late.

“Oi...is this a cake?”

“Yes! The taste was perfectly reproduced!”

*The taste is perfect?*

*Doesn't that just mean everything else is awful...?*

Shion was very confident. And looking at that pleased face only caused my uneasiness to increase. While regretting my own foolishness, I decided to take a bite. I took a spoonful and brought it in my mouth. I didn't need to say much more about the results.

I thought I was going to throw up.

The texture was Konjac. But the taste was sweet cake.

It had a gray color, and just like its appearance, it felt as if I was chewing on Konjac.

It was then that I realized how important visual information was with a cake.

No, it wasn't something limited only to cakes. With cooking, appearance was also essential to enjoyment. Even if the ingredients are served as is, they do not look delicious.

"How is it? Doesn't it taste good?"

I was annoyed looking at Shion's proud face, as if she wanted to declare, "It's perfect, right?"

From the beginning, Shion didn't know the basics.

The very first step—"What is cooking"—she had made zero progress on this rudimentary stage.

"Sit down. Sit there for a moment. I have to scold you a bit!"

"Huh?! It can't be, why...?"

Shion went from being all smug to teary-eyed in an instant. She was taken aback and didn't know what to do, but I didn't care and started lecturing her.

For about thirty minutes, and in earnest.

I talked to Shion about what cooking really was so she could understand. And Shion seemed to be reflecting on it. She promised me that she would definitely talk to someone from now on, and take their opinions to heart.

—Something like that happened.

Then, I remembered something after I scolded Shion. When Shion was trying her hand at making black tea, Diablo was with her. Diablo commented something along the lines of how he thought his body was going to be destroyed just from taste-testing black tea. Thanks to his sacrifices, Shion was able to improve.

If Shion practiced alone, she wouldn't realize what was wrong herself. It was a mistake we couldn't ignore anymore. Shion always tried producing results by only relying on her skills. It was hard to improve yourself like that.

We needed someone to act as a chaperone for Shion.

As a result, there was no way I could appoint Shion as a councilor. If she were to cause a problem at the council, it could harm the friendly relationship we just established with humanity. And if Shion did go on a rampage, the only people who could possibly stop her were limited to those in our country. If such a person existed—one capable of restraining Shion—then having that person as a councilor would be far more effective.

For example, Diablo.

"I think Diablo would do well," I mumbled, sharing my true feelings.

When that happened, the executives all together nodded.

"Hmm, if it is Diablo-dono, then I feel relieved."

"I'm sure he would be able to convince those nobles into doing whatever we want."

"And he wouldn't be strong-armed or bribed."

Rigurd, Benimaru, Gabil all voiced their thoughts, and it was clear they fully trusted Diablo.

Shuna and Shion agreed too.

"With his wits and resourcefulness, I think we would be able to progress things the way Rimuru-sama wants."

"Although I feel upset, Second Secretary (Diablo) is excellent. And if that interloper goes to the Kingdom of Ingracia, the importance of me, the First Secretary, will increase! There probably isn't anyone more qualified for the job."

Everyone seemed to approve of appointing Diablo as our councilor. It felt like Shion had some kind of ulterior motive, yet there was no doubt that she recognized Diablo's talent.

There were no opposing opinions.

Since there weren't really any other good ideas, for this case, we concluded with Diablo being the leading candidate.

But he was definitely not going to like it.

"However, keep in mind that Diablo decided to search for subordinates because he didn't like having miscellaneous work being dumped onto his lap. Maybe he'll be able to scout and bring someone who's

good at the kind of negotiation we're looking for. Diablo is the most reliable candidate thus far, but let's conclude with the reminder that it could potentially change."

We decided to postpone our meeting.

No, until someone was selected, attending the council would have to be my job. I wanted to make a final ruling on a replacement, and so I hoped Diablo would return soon.

It was an urgent matter, but I was the one who was seriously troubled by all this. The outcome depended on Diablo's return, which meant the meeting had a rather unnoteworthy end.

Peace was the best. Having no problems was a good thing. Being able to enjoy your free time was awesome.

Therefore, I decided to go look for Kurobee. And thanks to recently having some free time, I found something that had been weighing on my mind.

I went into the workshop and called for Kurobee.

"Kurobee-kun! Are you free right now?"

I greeted the disciples, who were bowing to show their respect when they saw me, with a wave and went inside the back room. There, Kurobee had several swords laid out, deep in thought about something.

"Ohh, Rimuru-sama? You came at a good time. I have something to report."

"Hmm, something to report to me? What happened?"

If it was something he needed to inform me about, perhaps he completed a new piece of work. Kurobee had been bringing my ideas to fruition, often developing them together with Kaijin, so I thought maybe he made another useful thing.

My assumption turned out to be true.

"It's about the weapon mechanism you requested a while ago. It's finally complete!" Kurobee exclaimed, pointing at the assortment of differently shaped swords that were spread out in front of me.

Seeing his happy expression, I could immediately tell that this was something truly astonishing.

But what was it that I requested?

There were so many spur-of-the-moment ideas I told him about that I couldn't pinpoint which exact one he was referring to.

Whatever the case may be, I'd probably find out more if I appraised it.

«Answer. Weapon: broadsword—the classification is unique-grade.»

*Ohhh, it's unique-grade.*

This was crafted by Kurobee as well, so it must be of excellent quality. However, I doubted that was the only reason why Kurobee had such a proud expression on his face. With his level of skill, he could have easily made several unique-grade items in the span of a single month. If Kurobee was forging a normal sword, then he only needed a day to finish it.

The average quality was unique-grade, and even if it was a failure, it still fell under the category of being one of the best rare-grade items. If he invested a lot of effort, it would require about two or three days, but in those cases, the classification was guaranteed to be at least unique-grade. I think he's still far away from being able to complete a legendary-grade item, but since it was Kurobee, I believed he would eventually accomplish it.

Furthermore, if skilled masters kept constantly using the weapons crafted by Kurobee, I had a hunch that they could evolve to become legendary-grade.

It was crucial to start the process off right by carefully selecting materials, like utilizing high purity magisteel. The weapons comprehend and evolve alongside the user's will, so I thought it wouldn't be long before we saw the birth of a legendary-grade weapon that Kurobee made. Therefore, I figured that there was no reason for Kurobee to go out of his way to show me a unique-grade weapon, but...

I inspected that broadsword a little more carefully.

A distinctive feature were the small holes—three of them, to be precise—the size of a marble located at the base of the blade.

Apart from that, there was nothing else that caught my eye.

Of course, the quality was fairly satisfactory for a sword. It was a different story had this been the work of a disciple, yet compared to Kurobee's other works, it didn't seem very remarkable. It felt a little weird saying this, but it was an extremely ordinary-looking unique-grade weapon.

It didn't appear to really have any special 'Engraving Magic' either... Wait, could this be?

"What is this? Although unique-grade is certainly remarkable, it isn't rare for you to get that classification, right?" I asked, feigning confusion while I hid my inner agitation.

"Have you forgotten by any chance? Ufufufu, this is an unbelievable thing. At a quick glance, it looks like an ordinary weapon and doesn't have any magical effects. Yet, it has an incredible characteristic."

Even with my—or rather, Wisdom KingRaphael's—'Analyze and Assess,' I couldn't detect anything unusual at all. If this really was what I thought it was, then the possibilities could be truly promising.

In front of me, Kurobee, who could hardly contain his excitement, brought out some kind of glowing ball. He then casually fitted it into a random slot.

"You place the ball like this into the hole on the slotted sword. If you do that—"

«Report. Weapon: broadsword has changed into Magic Weapon: broadsword.»

*Ah, I knew it!!*

An ordinary weapon had changed into a magic weapon. In other words, it meant that the idea I had been fantasizing about had ultimately come to fruition.

"Woooh!! Is it finally complete?"

"Ufufu, as expected of Rimuru-sama, you've realized it too? That's right. This weapon mechanism is exactly the same as what Rimuru-sama mentioned before!"

*That's right. I've definitely brought up that idea in the past.*

I knew that Kurobee had been steadily researching, but the thought of him succeeding this quickly never crossed my mind.

*You sure are scary, Kurobee.*

He was a reserved man who didn't feel the need to boast about his accomplishments; his work was more than sufficient enough to eloquently describe his prowess. He was a true example of a master craftsman.

"He-hey, Kurobee! Kurobee-chan! You're really amazing, you know that? This is a really amazing invention!!" I exclaimed to Kurobee, excited.

Kurobee smiled happily, just as excited, and nodded vigorously.

"Mufufufu, I did it!"

He had a smug look.

But it wasn't often you saw a smug face as handsome as his. Shion's smugness annoyed me, but unlike her, I honestly wanted to praise Kurobee.

There were several ways of crafting magic gear.

I could utilize the 'Synthesis and Separation' of Wisdom KingRaphael to affix magical effects to equipment. Kurobee could do the same thing; on the other hand, Kaijin and Kurobee's disciples were not capable of such an overpowered skill.

*Then, you may ask, what will they do to achieve the same effect?*

Normally speaking, they would achieve the same result by having an engraving mage cast 'Engraving Magic.' Dold was a skillful user of said magic and could easily cast it onto weapons.

Engraved magic gear could be infused with mana, and once infused, it was possible to execute certain magic. However, there was a limit to the number of varying magics that could be enchanted. At most, only two types of different magic could be enchanted. Moreover, it was impossible to remove the engraving after enchanting.

I figured that I had mentioned this plenty of times, but there was another method, and that was through the evolution of weapons. The weapons could be given special properties through the user's mana.

It wasn't an easy thing to achieve, and it usually took an exceptionally long time. However, the growth of the weapons would often develop unexpected power. Thus, this could be one of our research projects to see if there was a more efficient way to cause weapon evolutions.

We had acquired a large amount of unique-grade equipment from the ancient ruins of Amalita and supplied part of them as research material. Research like that would not yield results so easily, so we would have to be persistent on the matter.

Next, let's check out some of Kurobee's work.

These were some products that subverted conventional concepts.

Kaijin, Kurobee and I had been drinking one time when an idea suddenly came to us.

We would use magisteel, since it was a great conductor of mana, to craft hardened weapons. In addition, we also planned to prepare an item that can be used as a 'Core' to cast magic. That way, we might be able to create magic gear that didn't have fixed magic anchored in them.

For instance, what would happen if we fitted a sword with spirit magic stones?

The answer was...the same effect as the slotted swords—those weapons with holes in the base of their blade. And, the slotted swords weren't going to use magic stones, but rather jewels that had much higher purity.

"So, is it close to what Rimuru-sama had envisioned? As you can see, I've managed to craft these slotted weapons. Kaijin-san also discovered a way of condensing magic concentration in order to craft high-purity magic crystals!"

Kurobee sure had a lot to show off.

It looked like Kaijin really took part in the research effort. While Kurobee crafted the weapons, Kaijin crafted the marbles. It was no wonder how they were able to successfully create something this wonderful since the two of them had joined hands.

"Regarding the magic stones that provide these properties, we've named them 'Spirit Core.' We've also been calling them 'Magic Marble.' When Gabil-san was out catching wyverns, Vesta-san, who was taking a break from work, also joined us. I heard that those two were already researching the power core of the 'Spirit Magic Core.' Basically, they already possessed the technology to enchant magic stones with the earth, water, fire, and wind spirits," explained Kurobee.

I recalled Ramiris mentioning that the 'Spirit Magic Core' was meant to ensure all the spirits were activated at the same time. Kaijin and the others were doing similar research in the past, so crafting a single-spirit magic stone was a piece of cake for them.

All he had to do was adjust the size and power output of the magic marbles. With the properties of the magic power imbued in them, they became 'Spirit Cores,' which could be classified into four elements—earth, water, fire, or wind.

Naturally, the energy of these cores would run out. Once the magic contained within was depleted, they would be no different than purely decorative marbles. However, they could be recycled for repeated use.

"Can we replenish their energy?" I asked.

"We can. Although, we will need to find skillful mages to infuse our magic in it. It's not something an amateur can handle."

"I see. Perhaps we could create some new jobs by assigning some workshops to specifically infuse magic for other people, too."

"That's right. I think it will be a good idea to prepare as many magic marbles as possible. That way, we could also start trading these marbles."

That was indeed the case.

I was planning to mix these magic marbles into the items dropped by the labyrinth monsters. With that being said, these marbles could be a sort of new commodity on their own as well.

Yet, Kurobee wasn't finished. "Nonetheless, it's best that we be cautious. These magic marbles are still in the experimental stage, and their properties could change depending on their combinations."

"Combinations?"

What did he mean?

*'Their properties could change'...could it be?!*

"Please take a look at this. There are three empty slots on this blade."

*I knew it!*

“In other words, if you put two magic marbles with different spirits in them, you would get some unexpected properties?”

“That’s right!” Kurobee agreed with my speculation.

Then that would complicate things.

We would have to experiment more to verify these properties. Such innovative technology should not be published without a second thought.

«Negative. All information used in the labyrinth can be managed.»

*Oh, oh oh.*

*I see how it is now.*

This way, we could save the time and effort of experimenting, and in addition, it would eliminate any possible security issues since it was within the labyrinth. Now that I thought about it, the best approach was if we asked the labyrinth challengers for help in order to get a large pool of verified data.

Even if they managed to find some incredible discoveries, the only people capable of recreating this technology were probably from our nation. While I still had my reservations about our technology being leaked, since we planned to commercialize it, then it was only a matter of time. And if that was the case, then the smarter move was to at least carry out the experiment in a venue that we could overlook.

“Right, so what kind of dangers are you expecting?”

“It depends on the number of holes to the number of inserted magic marbles. It’s fine if there is only one slot. However, if you put a wind spirit next to a fire spirit, the overall magic power intensifies. In contrast, a water spirit combined with a fire spirit reduces power. Even so, one water spirit marble paired with two fire spirit marbles results in a dramatic spike in power. This is not power increasing by a factor of three we are talking about here, but a spike ten times more powerful than the original. That’s why I figured we should collect more test results. I’ve discussed the matter with Kaijin-san too.”

By the looks of things, there were plenty of hazardous combinations. Magic marbles genuinely required some experimentation. It would be a huge project.

I should listen to Raphael-sensei’s suggestion and carry out the research in the labyrinth.

“Is three the maximum number of slots a weapon can carry?”

“Yes. Regardless of how hard we tried, we could only support up to three for now.”

Moreover, the chances of successfully punching three holes was apparently one in one hundred. It was only when Kurobee devoted his entire strength and swung his whole body that the potential of forging a three-holed weapon appeared.

Naturally, it was next to impossible for Kurobee’s disciples to craft slotted weapons. Just four of his best students managed to craft a single slotted weapon.

By the way, even Kaijin was limited to a two-holed weapon. This goes to show how immensely difficult it was to successfully create these slotted weapons.

“Right now, we can only craft three-holed weapons. Despite that, with the right combination of magic marbles, they can give off the same power as a legendary-grade weapon,” Kurobee proudly revealed.

Under normal circumstances, magic swords were already extremely precious and treasured items. If their properties could be altered at will, such an invention would undoubtedly defy all common sense. If you could switch up the properties of your magic weapon depending on your enemies’ weaknesses—then they had honestly crafted something incredible.

Its value was priceless. Just like what Kurobee mentioned, these weapons could rival legendary-grade weapons. Furthermore, with the right combinations, some might really give off the power of legendary-grade weapons. This was truly unbelievable. I gave my sincere praise from the bottom of my heart to Kurobee and the others.

After discussing the matter with him, we decided to prioritize dispatching the completed slotted weapons to the labyrinth.

We also intended to manufacture a large quantity of one-time use magic marbles and scatter them within the labyrinth's treasure chests. In addition, once Kurobee's disciples learned how to craft slotted weapons, then they would be incorporated as rewards for defeating the labyrinth bosses, too.

It wasn't easy making three-holed weapons; however, it might be doable if we loosened the requirements on quality control. We could achieve this by reducing their durability and lowering the weapon grades.

"Would that work?"

"I believe it would. Although, it will definitely be fragile, so I don't recommend using it in actual battles..."

Kurobee didn't seem to agree, as he answered rather timidly.

With that being said, I believed that they would at least be able to endure our experiments.

In my opinion, we merely needed to verify the various combinations of magic marbles. That was why I had hoped Kurobee and his disciples could mass produce two or more holed weapons and distribute them to the labyrinth challengers.

Moreover, those challengers were no fools. Only amateurs would rely solely on unfamiliar and mysterious weapons that they found. There would not be a problem as long as the challengers were able to tell the difference between their main weapons and disposable weapons and use them accordingly. In teams that lacked a mage, these weapons could be a real treasure, which was why they were an important experimental case to study.

"Rimuru-sama, that's one evil expression you are making."

"Hahaha, you are overthinking things, Kurobee-kun!"

"Then I shall hurry and teach my disciples the techniques."

After saying so, Kurobee agreed to my request on increasing the quantity.

The plan was quickly finalized now that he had voiced his support.

Even though the project would consume quite a bit of magisteel, it could be considered a form of training for his disciples. We would be able to test out these potentially battleworthy products.

I decided to make these weapons the official equipment for centurions and higher-ranked officers. By considering their weaknesses and issuing the correct combination of marbles, their combat abilities could be raised.

"I'll be counting on you then!"

"Understood!"

And so, I left the matter in Kurobee's care.

"By the way, Rimuru-sama. Surely you have something in mind for me if you came all this way, right?"

That was when I remembered.

I completely forgot about the reason why I came to find Kurobee in the first place.

"The thing is, my sword—" I began, taking out my straight sword to show Kurobee.

"Are there finally holes on your blade?"

"No, that's not it. I wouldn't be as surprised if it were just that."

"I suppose you have a point..."

My sword wasn't bent nor shattered, and was completely familiar with my mana.

The blade was as black as the midnight sky.

However, nowadays, if I infused my blade with mana—

Shocked, Kurobee stared with his mouth open. "What! The b-blade is turning golden—no, that's not the only color. It's a rainbow. The blade is giving off the glow of a rainbow!"

"Surprising, right? I got quite the scare at first too; that's why I decided to discuss it with you."

I had been gazing at my sword back in my room one day when it suddenly started changing hues.

Obviously, I was caught off guard.

The blade was giving off a rainbow-like sheen.

Gold was never used during the forging process, yet it was giving off a shine brighter than orichalcum.

That was why I decided to investigate the matter.

«Answer. This is the "Ultimate Metal" hihiirokane.»

Raphael-san had said that to me.

Apparently, it was some very impressive metal that was superior in quality than the orichalcum I refined. Thus, I came to Kurobee for confirmation.

“T-this...what in the world is this? I can’t even analyze it...”

“I think it is called something like hihirokane?”

“Hihirokane? D-does something like that really exist? It’s said to be a mythical-grade metal that possesses immutable properties. I honestly thought it was something of a fairy tale...”

Kurobee was no longer just excited. He was stunned speechless.

I figured that this change would be powerful, but it seemed to have exceeded my expectations. Afterward, Kurobee and I studied the now hihirokane-comprised straight sword together.

In the end, we discovered that this sword would only respond to my mana.

Even if Kurobee infused his mana with it, the blade would remain jet black, and the metallic reaction at that point was still magisteel. However, it had indeed transformed into authentic hihirokane.

This hihirokane seemed capable of resisting the wavelengths of every single physical property. Normally, it wouldn’t even reflect light because it simply cancelled out the wavelengths within the visible light spectrum, which probably explained why the blade was pitch black. It could mask its unique properties from others as well—even from my ‘Analyze and Assess.’ How impressive.

Only when I imbued it with my mana and entered a state of combat would this sword begin to give off a rainbow-colored shine.

Even though it might be too eye-catching to unsheathe in a public area, as long as I didn’t infuse it with my mana, it should masquerade as an innocuous sword well enough. Moreover, it was also far sturdier than most average weapons, or should I say, its immutable properties meant that “It could not be destroyed.” Even when it was damaged, it could be repaired by saturating it with mana.

I was curious about what would happen if two hihirokane weapons clashed with one another, but I suppose it was no use thinking about something impossible like that.

There was only one thing I could say for certain right now: this straight sword was worthy of being my weapon, and that it had evolved to outshine the sturdiness of any other sword in the world. With this sword complementing my ‘Absolute Defense,’ I could afford to be a bit reckless at times.

In addition—

This sword was not complete just yet.

In order to engrave it with a magic marble—magic crystals of different spirit properties—I planned on drilling a hole at the base of the blade so that said marble could be inserted.

I was looking forward to the day that this sword could be finally considered complete. It was already quite impressive, but I couldn’t help but feel excited at the thought of its great potential.

“This sword is really something else. Despite the fact that I was the one who made it, the state it is in now is something I could have never imagined...”

“No no no, that’s not true at all. Kurobee is super amazing!”

“Thanks for the compliment. I am truly happy to hear Rimuru-sama’s praise like that!”

The special properties of this sword were only possible because Kurobee, while undeniably modest, was the one that made it. That much was certain.

“Even so, I believe that this sword can triumph Hinata’s saber.”

My sword was Kurobee’s greatest masterpiece, so wouldn’t it be at least the equivalent of a legendary-grade?

I had spoken based on this thought.

Kurobee’s answer to my comment was quite unexpected. “Are you referring to the legendary-grade Moonlight Saber? Hmm... Actually, this should be stronger. Perhaps this sword could possibly be a lead-in to the mythical-grade weapon witnessed by Veldora-sama.”

Mythical-grade—that was a phrase synonymous with the word “ultimate” and “supreme.” There was no such equipment for sale on the market. There was no such record of it in legends and folktales. However, something like that definitely existed.

For instance, Milim’s magic sword, Tenma, was certainly one of them. She had shown it to me before. At the time, even ‘Analyze and Assess’ failed to yield any results. According to Raphael-san, the quality of Tenma was above that of the Moonlight Saber. This sword had become a precious item like Tenma—I couldn’t help but imagine that it had also reached the ultimate realm of mythical-grade.

According to Kurobee, it appeared that my sword, at its present state, was at the level equal to higher-end legendary-grade weapons. In a way, there was a lot to look forward to as it had the potential of reaching mythical-grade quality one day.

We were both mesmerized by the sword for some time.

“Ah ah, it’s such a cool sword—”

“Indeed. Such beautiful blade patterns are truly a rare sight.”

The immutable hihiirokane gleamed brightly, adding a beautiful color to the Hamon—demonstrating the very essence of Kurobee’s skilled techniques.

We both couldn’t contain our excitement while observing the almost art-like patterns of the blade. Its beauty was irresistible; it was the best sword I had ever laid eyes on. And it would also continue to evolve. It wasn’t that far of an exaggeration to say that I had already acquired a mythical-grade weapon.

This unexpected discovery made me very happy.

I heard a flurry of panicked footsteps coming my way.

The person heading for the front of my office had no intention of stopping and immediately burst through the door without so much as a polite knock.

I could tell that it was Milim.

Had anyone else been so rude, they would have met Rigurd’s iron fists. If it were Veldora or Ramiris, they would have been punished by having their desserts confiscated. But Milim was a special case, so let’s not pursue the matter with her.

After all—

“R-Rimuru! It’s hatching, it’s gonna hatch!”

—It was because Milim had been holding onto an egg this whole time.

She had refused to go back to her home country, insisting on staying in our nation. She was worried that something might happen to the egg and felt that it would be safer keeping it near me.

Milim looked panicked.

Judging by her demeanor, I assumed that the egg was probably hatching soon. Milim’s old friend, Gaia, lived in the egg—the ‘Avatar Core’ was flickering on and off.

It was only a matter of time.

Gaia, a new monster, was about to be born.

“Gyuuiii!”

A tiny chibi dragon broke from its shell.

Its length was around fifty centimeters. It was hard to believe, given its tiny size, that this used to be the Chaos Dragon.

“—Are you Gaia?”

“Gyuu, Gyuu!”

The young girl and the tiny dragon hugged each other tightly.

It was very moving seeing the two reunited.

Gaia managed to hatch not long after Milim barged in. With the safety of her friend assured, Milim was now at ease. Yet, when I thought that this meant she was returning home, it turned out not to be the case.

“Come on, let’s take Gaia out on an adventure!” Milim proposed excitedly.

—No, I expected her to say something like this.

Naturally, my answer was—

"I mean, Frey-san must be quite worried about you, right?"

Frey-san had become Milim's guardian. If I played with Milim without giving her prior notice, she would undoubtedly get angry. It would be a different story had Gaia not been born, but seeing how energetic and healthy it was, Milim now had to go back and take care of the work she had been putting off.

"WAHAHAHA, there's nothing to worry about!"

*Nothing to worry about?*

*Rimuru did give Milim some of his wise advice.*

*Yet his advice has been completely ignored!*

*Just kidding.*

*I mean, since Milim suggested it, I guess I don't object.*

I had been busy dealing with the aftermath of the whole incident with Mariabell, and I've only recently started to take a break. It wasn't a bad idea to have some fun with my friends after working all this time.

"Besides, it's actually a necessity! Dragons are apex predators and will only eat what they hunt. Even babies are the same, so we need to teach Gaia how to hunt," Milim smugly added.

I heard that dragons don't go hungry very easily, and how they could survive on water and magicules alone. The downside was that they wouldn't grow. If we wanted it to grow bigger and stronger, appropriate workout and hunting monsters as meals were absolutely essential.

That was why Milim sought to adventure with Gaia. My initial impression was that she just wanted to run away from Frey's clutches, but it turns out that she had actually thought things through a lot.

"Right, then I know the perfect place for that."

"Uh! Is it the labyrinth?"

"Umm, that's right!"

And so, we initiated our plan to nurture Gaia.

Now that the issue was settled, let's gather everyone here as soon as possible.

I called Veldora and Ramiris, telling them that we were challenging the labyrinth once more. This time around, we would bring Gaia along and form a party of five. Even a newborn like Gaia was safe inside the labyrinth. Compared to bringing him on an adventure in the outside world, full of unknown variables, the labyrinth was unquestionably less risky.

"GAHAHAHA! We are actually quite busy right now, but because it's you guys asking for the favor, we will have to give you our full assistance!"

"Umm umm, you guys can rest assured now that we are here. Have faith that Gaia will grow just fine under our care."

I suddenly felt uneasy.

*—No, it's all right. I gotta have faith in them.*

Veldora and Ramiris had been maturing, so they should be able to read the atmosphere and act accordingly. Even Milim knew that this was not playtime but educating Gaia. Surely, they wouldn't be selfish and do whatever they wanted.

"Well then, let's go!"

At my command, everyone possessed their monster avatar.

Our adventure had begun.

We went to power level Gaia.

Me, Veldora, Ramiris and Milim.

Besides the four of us, there was Gaia, who was capable of flying, following me. Gaia was a dragon. It was originally the Chaos Dragon that possessed the power to destroy the world.

It shouldn't be weak at all.

And just as I suspected, it was indeed a dignified and very strong creature. It only took a few fights for Gaia to calibrate and get the hang of fighting. Furthermore, it had a wide-ranging dragon breath attack that could take out a whole group of enemies.

'Chaotic Breath'—a highly concentrated miasma with a curse that corroded any substance it touched. Its effect was similar to the 'Corrosion' of my 'Gluttonous KingBeelzebuth,' and its power was so strong that most monsters couldn't defend against it. In addition, Gaia possessed the 'Earth' spirit, a power carved in its 'Soul' since birth, which enabled it to control gravity.

Had the unsealed and freed Chaos Dragon retained intelligence—the mere thought of that possibility terrified me. With abilities like 'Curse Breath' and super-gravitational waves being thrown around, the number of casualties would have definitely been much greater.

But that was all in the past now.

Nowadays, Gaia was Milim's cute pet and our reliable companion.

We shouldn't be wary of it.

It was then that a Blood boar appeared.

Blood boars resided in the area near the thirtieth floor and were a rank B monster with strong legs. Its head and shoulders were protected by thick bones and muscles, while its skin was harder than steel. With a total body length over two meters, it would charge into its enemies with a speed of around fifty kilometers per hour. No one would be able to withstand that type of attack.

If you encounter it in a narrow passage, the blood boar was an unavoidable dangerous enemy. Yet, even a dangerous monster like that was no match for our team.

Gaia's ability to control gravity meant that the blood boar's charge was unexpectedly dulled. Seizing this opportunity, Milim landed a fatal strike and ended the blood boar's life.

The blood boar, feared for its ability to end up drenched with the blood of its enemies, had become a staple in Gaia's diet. With the outcome of today's hunt, I looked forward to Gaia's growth in the future.

As you can see, our team cooperated very well with each other.

Gaia also had a skill called 'Gravity Barrier,' which was expected to reduce the effects of a physical attack. This, combined with my magic barrier, gave us additional protection against enemies' magical attacks as well.

We learned all sorts of coordinated team attacks in the following days, and Gaia quickly became an integral member of our party. After that, we continued gaining actual fighting experience while at the same time, securing food for Gaia. Eventually, we made our way down to the forty-ninth floor.

Thus, the level boss of the fiftieth floor, who was quite the challenge for us last time, was defeated.

"GA-HAHAHA! Gozer can no longer stand against us!"

"That's right, that's right! Gozer is not that strong after all!"

"WAHAHAHA! That felt great!"

"Gyuu!"

These guys sure were excited.

*Eh? What do you mean we're having too much fun?*

*Nonsense, all this hard work is for Gaia's sake.*

*I mean, maybe a little.*

We were more or less enjoying ourselves during the process, but it was for Gaia's benefit as well.

With this elegant-sounding reason, we returned to town from the labyrinth.

"Looks like you all had a lot of fun."

A smiling Frey-san was waiting for us, with veins visibly popping across her forehead and a spine-chilling atmosphere surrounding her.

"Eh, EHHH! F-Frey! I-It's not like that. There's a very important reason behind this—!"

I felt a sudden sense of déjà vu.

Why?

What happened next was predictable too, as if I had somehow seen it before.

"Didn't you promise me that you'd return once Gaia hatched?"

"I-It's not like that. Gaia needed me!"

"Yes, that's right, but was that enough to break our promise?"

“B-but it needed education...”

“Just like how Gaia requires education, I think you could use some education too.”

“...?!”

This battle was settled.

Milim couldn't seem to persuade Frey. Regardless of how desperately Milim tried to deny it, Frey was unmoved.

I, of course, didn't want to step on the tiger's tail. And to be fair, Frey was being reasonable anyway. In the end, Milim tried to resist like a spoiled child, crying and causing a scene. However, she stood no chance against Frey's unfazed smile, and thus Milim was taken away, defeated.

All right then.

It was Milim's fault to begin with, so it couldn't be helped. If she had at least contacted Frey first, then she wouldn't have been so angry, but it was too late now.

“I'LL BE BACK!”

Milim left after saying this, though I didn't think there'd be a third time...

Even though she hadn't been given a curfew yet, and I was sure she'd be able to get permission to come visit me regularly, I believed that kind of privilege was in jeopardy at this point. Frey knew that it'd be dangerous if she didn't at least give Milim some time off, and that was why she had been generous with her. However, I didn't know what would happen if Milim kept running away from her responsibilities.

But that was someone else's business, which I preferred to stay away from and rather observe. Although it would probably still be best if she could teach Milim about ReCoCo (report, communicate, and consult).

While thinking so, I saw Milim off.

I was keeping Gaia by my side for the time being. There was an unlimited number of Resurrection Bracelets in the labyrinth for it to use, as well as plenty of food to eat. In addition, we even switched our avatars to automatic mode and let them explore with Gaia together. It was a fantastic way of allowing Gaia to keep on training.

It was still too early for Milim to directly coach it. I anticipated that we'd let him grow its strength to a certain extent before handing it to Milim.

And so, we had a new companion in the labyrinth.

—On a side note:

Eventually, five unique monsters found roaming the labyrinth were deemed as special level bosses, and struck fear into people's hearts. There were rumors among the challengers—these bosses appeared to have two levels of strength. While they were already terrifying in their normal state, they became extraordinarily powerful in their second state. To put it simply, we were puppeteering what were viewed as uncontrollable, nightmarish fiends.

But we only learned that later on.

I was afraid of what would happen to me if we secretly played while Milim was absent.

That was because once the automatic mode of our avatars were deactivated, their growth would sell us out to Milim. And even if there wasn't much growth, Milim's keen instincts would probably expose us regardless. Therefore, it was best that we avoid such a dangerous act.

So, I would like to introduce you to my serious work.

Since we would be dealing with the Western Nations, we had to outline laws as soon as possible.

As the ruling demon lord of the Jura-Tempest Federation, I held the final say on all matters. While most of my work could be handled by people like Rigurd to some extent, the important decisions had to be reviewed by me personally.

I had a great deal of authority.

To put it bluntly, I could manipulate the judicial, legislative, and executive powers at will. This was because I held the absolute right to control these three powers—and so, I held absolute power over the nation.

I was even overseeing military command, which could be considered the cornerstone of this nation. I could march our army with a single order. The appointment of any officers had to be approved by me as well.

The word “Federation” was purely superficial; in truth, this was no different than a dictatorship run by me. But in reality, I just tossed all my work to other people.

Administrative matters were handled entirely by Rigurd, while in terms of the military, Benimaru was acting on my behalf and held full control over it.

We were currently recruiting talents to serve as their aides.

Rigurd was learning about the separation of powers, whereas the former goblins chiefs, Rugurd, Regurd and Rogurd were acting as the head of the Judicial, Legislative and Executive branches, respectively. Nevertheless, there was a slight problem here—separation of powers could not be maintained without some kind of oversight.

Similar to Japan’s parliamentary cabinet system, the boundary between the legislative and executive was blurred. It was difficult foreseeing what correct measures I had to take in order to improve this problem.

Anyway, we began setting up the Legislative branch.

Regarding that, our nation settled on creating a Senate and a House of Representatives. Senators from the Senate would be appointed by me while the representatives from the House of Representatives would be elected through public elections.

The senators would not change. They would be allowed to continue serving forever unless they fell from grace by getting in any kind of trouble.

On the other hand, the representatives from the House of Representatives would be elected by the public. Holding an election wouldn’t be easy. It was going to require a lot of trial and error.

The Legislative branch would only be in charge of drafting laws.

Then, the Executive branch would be in charge of carrying out the charted laws and see to it that the nation operated accordingly. I wanted to have someone talented in order to solidify our Executive branch.

Using the Japanese bureaucracy as an example, even with the prime ministers constantly changing over and over, the nation still functioned very solidly.

Although there have been more and more problems in recent years...

Anyhow, we must be practical and push forward our policies gradually. We needed someone who possessed tenacity and diligence so that they wouldn’t give up so easily during the execution of our laws. However, long-term plans tended to waste unnecessary resources, and perhaps officials might be bribed to do bad things, so I wanted to prevent this kind of thing from happening by closely monitoring them.

As for the first wave of officials to take office in the Executive branch, I intended to select them from the pool of goblin tribe chiefs in Tempest. The elders, on the other hand, were to be elected by proxy.

In this regard, I believed it would eventually turn into a meritocracy. We were still in the process of reconciling the stakes and rivalries of each tribe, but I hoped that in the future, we would be able to unite together as one. Although it would also take time for us to do so, I wanted our nation to pursue a policy of peaceful reconciliation.

Leaving that aside, there was a problem here.

Those who were good at governmental duties tended to be mostly weaker races, whereas those who were at the top of the militant races were not good with the paperwork.

This was a troubling issue.

Should we focus on the strength within the monster world, or focus on the coexistence with humanity, knowledge, and coordination? It was quite the conundrum.

No matter how strong some people were, I wasn’t going to tolerate criminals; this was already well known to us. In addition, the military honestly had bragging rights to the sheer power they possessed. However, that didn’t mean they could interfere with the country’s operating policy. Depending on the future policies, I was afraid that it might cause discontentment.

Legislation, at its core, was gathering the opinions of the people, drafting them into law, and having it approved by the Executive.

However, at the Executive level, even the weak could control power by using their wits, and the strong could be deprived of their rights.

Wouldn't some people have a problem with that? This was to be expected at this stage.

After all, the Executive played an important role.

The Executive branch had the responsibility of managing the national budget, and the vast amount of wealth amassed in Tempest would be put to use by public officials. Myourmiles was our top financial functionary, but he alone could not uncover every single case of corruption and fraud.

Moreover, the division of territories also fell under Executive control. I expected that appointments would be made to develop regions at the appropriate time, but that plan might also become a point of contention. To prevent this from happening, all decrees would be issued in my name.

Finally, there was the Judicial Branch.

The most important work of the Judicial Branch was to try people who had been arrested and charged with a crime.

Police power was vested in the Executive Branch; yet, the power of arrest was not limited to only the Executive, but also to the Legislative and Judicial Branches. The purpose was, of course, mutual oversight.

The judiciary was responsible for sanctioning persons that were under arrest.

It was the Judicial Branch that required the highest regard for impartiality, and to protect the order of law without being swayed by the opinions of the people. Relying on the law to punish without mercy—that was surprisingly difficult.

I was also troubled by the question of how to guarantee a fair and just trial.

In any case, in order to implement the separation of powers once and for all, I was learning alongside Rigurd. The people's voices must be heard, and legislation must be discussed and enacted together. It was essential to establish a transparent political system.

In terms of administration, Rigurd and other talented people were currently being selected as officials and were training to become bureaucrats. In order to strengthen the authority of the central government, it was necessary to create a law enforcement agency as soon as possible.

The military, under Benimaru's direct control, and the intelligence agency "Dark Shadow" led by Souei, would answer only to my commands. In order to prevent chaos in the chain of command, it was decided that they would not listen to any orders from the Executive Branch. Therefore, I was planning to appoint someone quite powerful as the head of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

There was another thing.

The judiciary also had problems.

Conducting trials could easily stoke violence and resentment on all sides. This demanded not only smarts, but a certain amount of adroitness to get the job done.

Of course, judges needed protection, but that thought alone was disturbing.

Purposefully attacking a judge for the sake of revenge was absolutely intolerable, and was grounds for an immediate death sentence. However, we couldn't rule out the possibility of someone being aware of the consequences and still committing a crime like that.

Unlike humans, monsters were tough. No matter how discrete the security was, officials were susceptible to ambushes. That was why we wanted our judge to have some personal physical strength.

"Uh—in that case, relying on Rugurd alone is rather concerning," I admitted.

Rigurd agreed with my view. "Right. Even though he is my close lieutenant, he's not as strong as a centurion. If we switched to Rogurd however, he wouldn't lose to any average youngsters..."

Rugurd had a deep and ruthless side, but could deliver an honest verdict. Good for a judge, but not powerful enough to protect himself when things went wrong.

Rogurd was a strong man, and can take on a thousand captains one-on-one. However, he was spearheading all the ministries and departments in the Executive Branch in place of Rigurd, and therefore it would be difficult for him to transfer over to the Judicial Branch.

I pondered for a bit. "I would like to set up a prosecutor's office within the Executive Branch. If it's a domestic crime, Gobta and the security force will be able to stop it, but when it comes to cracking down on executives and lawmakers, it's too much of a burden for those guys, isn't it?"

"Indeed, you're right. All sorts of monsters, even named majins, may come to our nation. In addition, people confident of their own strength from various countries will also gather here due to the influence of the opening ceremony. It's not surprising that there's going to be a lot of commotion."

While most of the effects of the Founding Festival were positive, due to a certain event that occurred, it's also begun to attract strong characters. In a way, it was what we wanted, but some fools simply couldn't be satisfied by the labyrinth, they had to go to town and make a mess.

With Gobta's return, the security force had been strengthened significantly. But Rigurd didn't think that was enough.

"There are still A-ranked majins, aren't there?" I asked.

"Yes, although the numbers are small. They haven't shown any outward signs for wanting to rampage, but I thought it would be prudent to stay vigilant."

Just like Rigurd said, preparedness was very important.

There was a huge difference in the fighting abilities between each individual, so it was smarter to be proactive rather than reactive when dealing with majins.

"Hmm, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Judicial Branch. There's also the matter of sending someone to be our diplomat in the Western Council. At the moment, we all have our own jobs to do, so it doesn't seem like a good idea to make any personnel changes..."

"It would be more confusing."

Hmm...that was going to be a headache.

The system was being established, the laws were beginning to be enacted, but the necessary resources for actually executing them was still in its infancy. There were many vacant positions that needed to be filled.

That was the downside of rapid growth, and it was something we could not avoid. I could only sigh at our lack of manpower...

It was no use ruminating over not having enough personnel.

I decided to lighten my mood by inspecting the construction sites.

Geld was building a new capital on the ruins of Beast Kingdom Eurazania.

The construction was going smoothly and the foundation work had been laid out. We laid the foundation all the way down to bedrock, and magical high-strength concrete foundations connected by steel and rebar proved to be an excellent base. By using stones with mana as the building material, not only were they sturdy, they would give off a unique magic wavelength that repelled low level spells.

The downside was that we could not use magic to reduce its weight during transportation, but the positives outshined that, so I suppose it was good enough. By the time this giant castle was completed, not only would it be capable of defending against an outside attack, it would also block magic being used inside as well.

We were even able to create magic rocks that were several hundred times harder than concrete. After polishing it, a towering pillar rose from the center, supported by the foundation, and seemed to almost reach the sky. Using the pillar as support, the outer walls were being erected next.

I should mention that the scale of this project was simply enormous. The pillar alone was a spectacle. Below, people were bustling around like busy ants. It was certainly a strange sight to behold, but it was also evidence of just how massive the building was.

"Ah, it's Rimuru-sama. We welcome your presence," Geld greeted as he happily ran up to me.

Not wanting to bother everyone working, I came here using 'Teleport' from my 'Spatial Domination.' But it appeared that I was discovered by Geld in the end.

"Hey, Geld. Long time no see. It's great seeing you guys progressing so smoothly."

"Hahaha, thanks a lot. Surely everyone will be delighted to hear Rimuru-sama's praise!"

Geld gave off a bright laughter, which brightened me up as well.

He wouldn't be reacting this way had the operation not gone smoothly.

The cheerful atmosphere at the site was what made the work enjoyable.

"No no no, I really mean it. You guys seem to be doing a lot better than I anticipated. Will you guys be finishing soon?"

"Indeed. It is thanks to everyone getting along so well."

According to Geld, he thought a lot by himself after his talk with me. He then went on to have open conversations with the captives majins, lending his ears to their complaints.

There was no way that he could move the hearts of those who were completely unmotivated to work. With that being said, Geld did not rely on strength to rule, but by understanding others' viewpoints.

"They were all afraid for their future circumstances. They were scared that they would be executed due to their past conflict with Rimuru-sama," explained Geld.

"Huh? Why would I do something like that?"

"Of course you wouldn't. We all know that Rimuru-sama is not a ruthless demon lord. But these people are new around here. They do not know Rimuru-sama's character, and consequently, they couldn't completely shake off the feeling of fear. That's why I decided to share my own experience with them—"

Geld retold the story of the duel between the Orc Lord and me, the outcome, and the fate of the orcs. The majins were only half convinced, despite the large group of high orcs right in front of them. Those that were involved backed up Geld's testimony, and as a result, few people doubted his story.

"Some of them were calling Rimuru-sama naive, but I replied with 'So what?.' I asked them, 'Are you really going to try and rebel when even I can't win against him?' That shut everyone up," Geld recalled, chuckling. If it was Shion or Diablo, they probably would've lost their nerve and killed the misspoken majin. Once again, I was reminded of how kind-hearted Geld truly was.

And just like that, Geld managed to unravel the minds of the captives.

He would also invite them out for drinks every week and treat them to delicious meals. Nowadays, they had been completely won over by Geld's masculinity and were willingly assisting us.

More importantly—they felt that they could be of help to other people; having their efforts recognized must have filled them with pride. Not only were they laboring hard to be freed of their captive status, they were also experiencing the fun of working. This was far more efficient than forcing them to work. In some sense, our effective approach was to be expected. And so, these higher majins' support became a great help to us.

We resolved the lack of manpower issue while at the same time, work became more efficient. Naturally, with this improved efficiency, construction was progressing far better than I hoped.

In fact, in contrast to the progress of construction sites in my previous world, it was quite shockingly fast. Honestly, the two could not even be compared in the first place. And keep in mind that construction was proceeding entirely by hand, since heavy machinery didn't exist.

People might be dubious at this comparison, but when they see the construction in person, surely these doubts would be blown away.

After all, these majins could not be seen as natural or human.

Some were able to lift up several tons worth of material by themselves.

Some could obliterate junk and rocks in the way with their bare hands.

Of course, some of them could fly, so their safety standard for working several stories in the air was different than humans.

*No wonder they're so fast*—I nodded with a serious look on my face.

There were construction projects at several other locations as well.

If this was war time, it was a bad idea fighting on several battlefields at the same time, but with construction, it was a different story. Construction could be carried out with different phases of planning to maximize efficiency. Furthermore, this was a fantastic training opportunity for our field engineers, which was why we arranged field officers to lead each team and let them give orders at their discretion.

To be more specific, there were four locations with construction occurring—the outskirts of Dwargon, Ingracia, Eurazania and Sarion.

The one near Dwargon had already been connected with a highway, with inns lining it. The goal of the current project was to widen the road and lay down tracks, specifically for the magitrain. We also hired adventurers as paid labor. Because of the job offer, it had quite the surge of popularity. The site was full of energy.

On the Ingracia side, it was just like Dwargon's route. The difference was that the one in Ingracia was already broad enough, so we could start laying down rails directly. It wouldn't take too long before it was finished.

The one leading to Eurazania was next. For now, we had everyone working on jobs such as widening the road while preserving the natural environment. The wood cut down from the process would be transported to the new but still under construction capital. That was why we had been making arrangements so that the supplies could be shipped out at a faster pace.

The road leading to Sarion, on the other hand, was not progressing so smoothly. We initially began with cutting down forests, but it was taking more time than expected. The main workforce there consisted of high orcs. They could use 'Stomach' to transport material. As they were the most skillful of workers, the task of widening the road should have posed no problems.

However, they were also required to transport the wood they had cut down. This type of work required more manpower, which would only be sufficient by the time the operation in Eurazania was complete and the two construction crews rendezvoused.

First, our workers needed to be able to traverse the forest. After which, we planned to gradually build and then pave the road. We would only start drilling the tunnels and laying down tracks after everything was complete.

This was the current situation on our four main fronts.

Some people were against the idea of running the magitrain to the Armed Nation of Dwargon. They claimed that predicting the movements of the Eastern Empire was impossible, and that there was a possibility of information leakage.

Furthermore, they were afraid that the Eastern Empire would steal the magitrain and repurpose it for military invasion. In that way, the magitrain tracks we went through all the trouble of laying down could turn out to be a double-edged sword.

Others were also worried that the route was going to be sabotaged.

Some even suggested that "We should build a fortress to face the Empire."

The inn town near Ameld river had a large residential area. They were arguing to settle at the location and turn the town to a strategic fortress city. I had considered the proposal, but ultimately decided against it. I thought it was meaningless.

Right now, we still had no idea what the Eastern Empire would do. The thought of adding more to our growing pile of work definitely put me off. Even though we had more manpower these days, there were still a ton of things that needed to be done.

However, this did not mean that we were being careless.

It wasn't that we were sitting idly by with the assumption that the Eastern Empire wouldn't launch a preemptive strike, but rather that if the other side did seriously attack us, then we would simply do our best to crush our enemies. I did not want to continue dealing with them with a facade, and it was incredibly foolish maintaining a high level of vigilance all the time.

It depended on how the Empire came at us, but we intended to meet their challenge with full strength and force a short yet decisive victory. Among our ranks, some of our lieutenants also agreed to this more direct approach.

By the time the war began, the train tracks, among other things, that we spent so much time putting down would likely be destroyed. However, even if that turned out to be the case, we could always construct them again. We should not delay the progress of our development just because we were afraid of something that might happen in the future.

The same goes for the angels' invasion.

No matter who our opponent was, we would not back down.

We will roll with the punches when the time comes.

We would simply have to rebuild what was ruined.

While it was crucial to think about how to protect these things, people were more important, not objects. As long as we protected the craftsman, then everything would turn out fine.

With this resolve in mind, the construction and development of the projects were carried out at an incredible pace, thanks to sheer determination and planning.

The last location I visited was the Kingdom of Farmenas.

Following our agreement, Youm found some workers to handle the preparation duties tied to the opening of the magitrain. We received reports that they had completed both selecting an initial route for laying track and the subsequent site surveys.

This was progressing faster than I had anticipated too.

I thought they would only handle the matter after the farming season, yet Youm—or rather, Myuran—seemed to prioritize the train tracks.

"It's only rational. If the agricultural products of our nation can be exported to other nations, then that means the foreign currencies earned will enrich our nation. I'm well aware of this. In addition, it'll make it easier for ration support to arrive should there ever be a famine. When this wonderful magitrain is complete, I will not allow our nation to be ill-prepared and lack the necessary infrastructure," Myuran declared with a smile, clearly more concerned than I was.

Despite the fact that she was now the queen of the Kingdom of Farmenas, she still very much cared about the nation's policies.

"Hahaha, I am honestly useless these days. Rommel was good at these things, so I sent him to supervise the field operation."

With a wry smile, Youm introduced me to a man named Rommel.

I recalled seeing him before in the past. He was Youm's mage companion during his time as an adventurer.

Rommel nervously reported the current situation to me.

Scrolling on a precision map that was the equivalent of national secret, he pointed out specific locations to pass the road and rails through. The map also clearly indicated the results of each detailed survey, just as I had instructed.

We all agreed that I would finalize the measurement in the end, which was why I headed immediately to the construction site.

I then used the rest of the day to double check all the information.

"While there is still room for improvement, everything seems to be in order. Did you assign someone to keep records of each region?"

"Yes, everything has been completed according to your arrangement."

"Then, please inform the person in charge that they need to resurvey this section here, here and here again."

It looked like they were doing a good job nurturing new talents. The accuracy of the schematic that had been drafted was within the margin of error I had permitted. While some teams seemed to have exceeded this margin, it showed that they had been undoubtedly studying very carefully. Although I asked them to

reevaluate their surveys, they should be able to find the mistakes themselves. While it might be harsh, we couldn't let this go that quickly.

It would be meaningless if I were the one finishing all the work since I had incredible precision. I hoped to encourage the new talents by having them finish all the procedures by their own hand. Considering their present skill level, this minor investigation shouldn't take long.

We might even begin the construction early, so I'd have to inform Kaijin and the others to prepare the automatic, barrier-producing magic generators beforehand. They had a proven track record. Thanks to the magic generators, the roads connecting our nation and the Kingdom of Blumund were safe and sound. The stone tablet would also glow after reacting with magicules, meaning they could be used as landmarks in the dark. Both travelers visiting Tempest and the patrolling soldiers gave high praises to the invention. Here in the Kingdom of Farmenas, the magicule concentration was lower than that of the Great Jura Forest, but I still planned to deploy some generators here.

That day, I received a grand welcoming ceremony by Youm and the others.

"To be honest, I never expected you to come here by yourself. Young Master is just as easy-going as usual. I'm really jealous." Youm, who had been drinking quite a bit, expressed his envy of me.

But he was mistaken.

I was not by myself; I brought Ranga with me.

"Ranga is here too."

"Do you require my service? Master!"

Responding to my words, Ranga extended his head from my shadow.

"WOAH! So you were there, gave me a good scare..."

"Of course. Even though there shouldn't be anyone bold enough to challenge a demon lord, protecting my master is my duty as a subordinate. Please have this understanding when you act as the ruler of a nation."

"I'll pass. When Edgar can stand by himself, I'm getting rid of this boring king role."

Edgar was the son of the former king Edmalis. He seemed to be a pretty clever lad and his royal bloodline was irrefutable. Youm thought his usurping the crown did not have a justified enough cause and wanted to have a proper member of the royal family act as the heir to the throne.

However, Edgar, the person in question—

"Your Majesty Youm, please don't speak of nonsense like that! Now that Lady Myu is pregnant with the heir to the crown, it's only natural for him to inherit the throne! My dream is to serve that person in the future, so please don't say something that could be taken for unnecessary dispute!"

He didn't seem to want to be king as he rejected Youm's words.

As opposed to that—

"Eh, hold on a second! Didn't I just hear something important?"

I was in the middle of passing a drumstick over to Ranga when I froze, and instead asked Youm what was on my mind.

*'Lady Myu is pregnant with the heir to the crown'—doesn't that mean Myuran is pregnant?*

So a greater majin could have a child with a human that easily...

"Could it be that Your Majesty has not told your benefactor, Rimuru-sama, about the heir?"

"Well, it was too embarrassing to reveal—"

"I felt it was a bit awkward to bring it up..."

Edgar appeared quite baffled as he inquired, whereas Youm and Myuran answered almost simultaneously.

*You guys are seriously a match made in heaven.*

Speaking of which, I recalled that when monsters gave birth to children, they would be weakened. Would Myuran really be all right?

"It should be fine. I was originally human, so even though my strength will weaken some, it won't matter too much these days. With my knowledge of magic and skills, I shouldn't be inconvenienced too much."

My concerns were quickly soothed.

“By the way, regarding Grucius, he seems to have been hit rather hard by this news. He hasn't been himself ever since...” Youm mentioned sadly.

No wonder.

I had been planning to ask why I hadn't seen Grucius since my arrival.

*It's all right, I'm sure he'll find his other half.*

But that was not something I would know.

I couldn't get a girlfriend for the longest time myself, so this was a problem Grucius had to solve himself.

“I'm sorry to hear that. With Grucius in that state, are you sure the knight order is fine?” I questioned.

Likely due to Diablo's interfering, the thriving insurgency had been pacified, so I figured there shouldn't be anything to worry about. However, it was still concerning to have the commander of the knight order acting like this, which was why I was afraid there might be problems.

“It's all right, my companions were within the order too. More importantly, Uncle Razen is amazing. Just like what a living legend is supposed to be, he's something else.”

*Oh yeah.*

This nation still had Razen.

I heard that Diablo took him as his servant. He seemed to be working pretty hard for the Kingdom of Farmenas. I mean, after all, Diablo made a pact with him using the Unique Skill 'Tempter,' so we shouldn't have to worry about him betraying us.

“Speaking of this Razen-sama, he's been energetically overseeing the domestic situation. He would regularly contact us with magic and even assisted us in eliminating dangerous elements across the kingdom!” Edgar revealed with shimmering eyes that only a young boy could have. Apparently, Razen was very popular in this nation.

I had received all sorts of reports about him and thought that this Razen was only involved with immoral and dirty business, but perhaps from the perspective of someone trying to protect his nation, he probably was a very outstanding person.

I didn't intend to pick a problem with him and instead listened very carefully to what Edgar had to say. With a change of perspective, how you viewed certain things began to change as well.

As the saying goes, history is written by the victors, and the losers lose everything.

In the eyes of this nation's citizens, King Edmalis and Razen were the righteous ones. Had we been defeated during our war with the Farmus army, we would likely have been known in history as an evil and vicious band of monsters.

I didn't intend to belittle my opponents with illegitimate means like that, but that was merely because there was no need to do so.

With that in mind, Youm's rejuvenation of this nation was a huge success. He managed to retain the exceptional individuals from the old systems among his rank and as a result, kept the public outcry to a minimum and continued to rule the nation. In addition, they also managed to manipulate information such that harmful comments against our nation were kept from spreading, and instead, we were now considered a friendly country.

At this rate, human prejudice towards monsters would likely soon fade away. Diablo sure was impressive. He was able to understand human nature well enough to bring me the outcome I wished. Everything was proceeding according to plan.

Feeling satisfied, I chatted with Youm and the others for the rest of the day.

During my absence, Ramiris and Veldora seemed to be hard at work too.

After having inspected all the major construction sites and returning home, the two came out to welcome me.

*Is there a problem? Or do they have something to show off?*

It was the latter.

“Great news, Rimuru! The prototype is finally finished. If the test run is successful, we begin producing actual models en masse!”

“Umm umm, I’m very confident this time, come check it out!”

Urged by the two, I followed them as they hurried along.

Right now there were several research facilities within Tempest. The one open to the general public was the smithing workshop used by Kurobee and his disciples.

The technology there couldn’t be pirated or immediately learned.

While the special weapons I asked them to craft were mainly kept secret, other armaments and gear were displayed to the public for advertisement purposes. And by using methods such as displaying newly crafted items, we hoped to build brands around Kurobee and Garm, respectively.

However, what came next was the real deal.

These research facilities had their location kept strictly confidential from the public. We wanted to construct these institutions in locations that were difficult for any average person to enter, but at the same time, could defend easily. Based on these criteria, we ultimately decided to build them inside the underground labyrinth.

At one hundredth floor stood the research facility for me, Veldora and Ramiris’s personal usage. Gabil was appointed as the director of our nation’s official research institute. In addition, a forest was already growing on the ninety-fifth floor, and so a large research facility was established there as well. Since all of the beastmen refugees had already left for their home country, it was an empty, spacious area that we promptly utilized.

Alchemists from Dwargon, magic researchers from Sarion and Vampiric researchers from Lubelius, who allegedly had been bored out of their minds, all gathered here in our country, and thus required a large-scale research facility. The researchers sent by these nations were experts in all kinds of different fields.

The alchemists from the Armed Nation of Dwargon were experts in spirit engineering. The ‘Magic Armored Soldier’ scheme that Kaijin and Vesta were once involved in was essentially an inquiry into that type of research.

In this world, people believed that natural phenomena were directly related to the power of spirits. There was a total of five traditional spirits: earth, water, fire, wind, and space. Furthermore, there were also the three greater spirits of light, dark and time. The science that utilizes phenomena caused by these spirits, and the subsequent technology related to them, was known as spirit engineering.

It was one of the most well-known fields of research in this world.

The magic researchers from Sarion, on the other hand, studied the more secretive field of ‘Magic Science.’ It was a realm that only those who had mastered magic could reach. It was said that the basic theories were first proposed by a genius elven researcher, Sarion Emperor Elmesia’s mother. There seemed to be fewer and fewer people who were able to inherit the knowledge contained within this field.

To what extent could the world be changed by manipulating the laws of magic?

I heard that even philosophy was considered to be a part of this field’s study.

I felt that it was something Diablo would love to look into.

The fundamental theory of ‘Magic Science’ seemed to infer that by forcefully altering phenomena, spirit engineering can be developed. The difficult part was that the theories could only be understood by mages that have mastered elemental magic. However, the practicality of this unique theory was also obvious. It was no wonder why Sorcerer’s Dynasty Sarion declared it to be a national secret and forbade anyone from leaking it to other nations.

The last batch of researchers were vampiric. I took them in as a result of my agreement with Luminas. They were called ‘Surmounters,’ a group of strong people, each equivalent to a Calamity-class threat. The problem was they were all oddballs, but luckily there weren’t a lot of them. At first, I thought they’d be a headache for me if they were to start causing trouble, but I quickly realized that I was worrying too much.

“Yo—Rimuru-sama! Moi is most interested in fun stuff!”

The leader of the group was a very bright and easygoing guy that quickly broke the ice. They were simply people that wanted to explore and learn new things. They didn't mind if their colleagues were humans, elves, or dwarves. Their priority was to sate their curiosity.

Although, there were indeed some arrogant individuals.

However—

Veldora and Ramiris were the ones supervising things. Even though Ramiris herself was not that menacing, her assistant Beretta and Treyni-san would not sit still to any rudeness directed at their master.

The arrogant ones' demise was truly tragic.

"Oi, where's my tea?" a certain annoying dragon demanded.

"Yes—right away...!"

"Ahh, what a rough day. My shoulders are so stiff," a certain annoying fairy sighed.

"Please allow me to give you a massage...!"

*What are these 'Surnounters' even...*

"Oh, these stupid idiots, you're useless!" the leader of the vampires lamented, but at least he didn't complain about this to Veldora or Ramiris.

And so, they had a surprisingly smooth time integrating with everyone.

What they were researching was even more interesting. The vampires' research was the polar opposite of 'Magic Science.' Luminas labeled their research as "useless," but I disagreed.

The research the vampires were undertaking was exactly the same as 'Engineering Physics' back on Earth. It was devoid of any magical components and instead tried to discover the laws of the natural world. By jotting down detailed records of natural phenomena, they would then turn them into physical laws. This was the essence of their study.

They always wound up obtaining the same outcome, regardless of who the researcher was at the time.

In some sense, it was to be expected, but there were also many variants due to the many magical phenomena in this world. In a way, this field of study could be considered unorthodox.

Luminas didn't seem to like it, but I believed it was quite interesting.

To be honest, the recording of data was a means to kill time to the vampires, but this huge collection of data was significant. If we were to use this data as a foundation, we could investigate the influence of magic on the world much more easily.

A breakthrough in science often came from the accumulation of small, minor discoveries over time.

Therefore, what they were researching should not be underestimated.

And so, we managed to bring scholars of varying fields to our nation.

The knowledge they carried over was immeasurable, and the research findings as a result of this academic exchange would prove to be invaluable. We needed to ensure the personal safety of every researcher, in addition to keeping the outcome of their research confidential. That was the duty our nation had to uphold.

The researchers working here were wearing specially-designed bracelets. It was a fine gadget that Ramiris made, which removed the numerical limit on the traditional Resurrection Bracelet. It also included functions such as communication and teleportation within the labyrinth, though the preset teleportation destinations were only the surface and the research facility.

Since the researchers had to keep all sorts of secrets, we had to inconvenience them on some matters.

Based on these considerations, we gave away these items for free.

They could only access the predesignated locations and couldn't move between floors or teleport to other areas. Moreover, once they teleported, relevant data about the user would be recorded to prevent any information leak.

Although, they still had other means to move around; for instance, asking the dryads to help teleport them. In that regard, they needed Treyni-san's direct approval. All in all, there shouldn't be any way to conduct espionage activities within the labyrinth.

Technically speaking, however, the ‘Surmounters’ might have other methods of breaking these restrictions, but doing so could be dangerous for them. Even I had no idea the exact types of traps that were set in the labyrinth, so it wouldn’t be easy for these vampires to try and break through them.

Furthermore, all of their activities were being monitored, so if they were up to some dishonest activities, we could immediately pursue them. And if they got stuck in parts of the labyrinth, we could easily apprehend them.

There were reasons for such strict regulations.

I had been informed that highly developed civilizations tend to attract attacks from the angels—and that was the main reason why we had prepared so thoroughly.

In that regard alone, there was no safer place than Ramiris’s labyrinth.

Inside there—specifically, the ninety-fifth floor of the labyrinth—it should be possible to stop even the angels’ invasion. Ramiris bragged that if anything were to happen, she could switch the floors instantly, exchanging floor ninety-five for floor ninety-nine.

This deep city within the labyrinth was likely the safest place in all of Tempest.

In order to prevent secrets from leaking, this place was completely isolated. On top of that, the labyrinth also provided the perfect environment for the welfare of the staff, including health care, so the labyrinth was a great living environment too.

The ninety-fifth floor had some of the most luxurious service facilities in our nation, so I figured that would be enough to satisfy the researchers.

By the way—

While the sealed cave was considered as a major research site in the past, it had been shut down. The prolonged planting of hipokute herbs caused the concentration of magicules to drop drastically within the cave. Therefore, even though the concentration was still relatively high, the product yield would naturally not be as ideal. That was why we decided to move the hipokute plantation to a different location.

With that being said, we had already planned to transform the flower field on floor ninety-three to a special zone for growing hipokute herbs. We would merely increase the magicule concentration on the floor in order to mutate the weeds.

Gabil and the others’ research facility was moved underground to the hundredth floor too, since one of the reasons why the plantation moved was for conveniences’ sake.

The sealed cave was excavated all the way to the back of the mountain and became a residence for the wyverns. Since that was considered a military secret, we had completely shut down the location, preventing any ordinary citizens from entering. All vital research would be conducted within the labyrinth in the future.

As I suspected, the two were bringing me to the ninety-fifth floor’s research facility.

The fact that we weren’t heading to their private chambers appeared to suggest we were reviewing the results from our joint research agreement. They did mention a prototype, so it seemed that the research was going smoothly.

It looked like our key item would be ready just in time for the railroad tracks to open.

The ninety-fifth floor, which I hadn’t visited in a while, had gradually become a forest-type city before I knew it.

In this beautifully maintained park, the cityscape seemed to mesh perfectly with the surrounding trees.

I always wondered how they managed to erect such a large city, but considering some of the elves had once lived in the forest, this was probably the manifestation of their wisdom.

The treants seemed to have also helped build this wonderful place.

Naturally, the challengers who only briefly visited the labyrinth were barred from entering this hidden town.

Only those who had challenged the labyrinth under official rules earned the right to enter the city.

I stopped by the elven cabaret quite often myself, but I seldom visited them in the morning. That’s why I didn’t expect this place to change so much.

I had been leaving everything in Veldora and Ramiris's hands, and this result was very interesting. The other floors seemed to have undergone drastic changes too. I couldn't help but anticipate a more casual trip to the labyrinth in the future.

With that in mind, I continued to follow the two.

Soon, I laid eyes on the research facility in the center of the park. The building was constructed from reinforced concrete, so it was rather jarring. There were also many large buildings adjacent to the main facility. We also had a dormitory for the foreign researchers to sleep in. For some reason, these supposedly brand-new buildings built under my supervision looked a bit ancient. However, it did give off a rather unique air, so I guess that was okay.

"It's so quaint with all these trees nearby," Ramiris gushed.

"Right? A research facility obviously needs an aura of mystery!" Veldora declared proudly.

*What 'aura of mystery' are you talking about? They're like a bunch of kids joyfully building their secret base. Where did you learn all this bizarre stuff?*

"Everyone's getting along well, we were even thinking about forming a secret society!"

*Secret society?*

*What the hell have you guys been doing here?!*

"Hehehe, wasn't Rimuru the first one to reveal everyone's research results? Some people originally wanted to steal other nations' technology, but because of what you did, they were finally able to turn back on the right path."

I never expected this.

There were huge barriers between nations, and researchers from different countries were no different, since they all had contrasting opinions. Each had their home nations' best interests in mind, and some planned to absorb the technology of others while keeping their own hidden.

I figured this joint research wasn't going to work if that happened, and so I decided to expose everyone's technology in one go.

In the eyes of Raphael-sensei, there was no such thing as "secret technology." I summarized everything so that it was easy to understand, like some kind of official manual, and handed everyone a copy. I had generously used up all the expensive paper that Yuuki helped prepare for me. Although it was a little wasteful, I deemed it a necessary loss.

As opposed to parchment, I wanted to record information on paper that was made from plant fibers. The paper given to me by Yuuki appeared to be manufactured by the Empire, though its quality was almost the same as paper produced on Earth. I was sure everyone saw my seriousness after using all this valuable paper. After the incident, the researchers became very open with one another. Everyone was cooperating out of pure desire to fulfill their intellectual curiosity.

"Ohh, you compiled confidential information from every nation involved and made it into a data book so everyone could read it, didn't you? Even though people were very vocal about it at the time, I thought it would lead to new technologies being developed."

"Umm umm, we share just this thought with Rimuru! We later held a recognition-of-service party and everyone found a kindred spirit in each other," added Ramiris.

Consequently, researchers gave up on trying to hide their technological secrets and began cooperating with each other; strangely enough, an unusual sense of solidarity quickly developed within the research facility. It seemed that everyone was no longer just thinking about their home nation. Even the 'Surmounter' vampires had become companions that considered themselves to be our equal.

Things were getting interesting.

This was good.

Yet despite this fantastic outcome, there was a problem.

The researchers gradually formed the structure of a community, which was led by Veldora and Ramiris.

That might be the reason why an independent organization was formed.

That's right.

It was like some sort of evil secret society, where everyone could enjoy researching the things they truly liked. It was quite the mysterious environment. Ramiris was especially interested in the various fields of research. She eventually became the group's mascot and idol. Veldora, on the other hand, became the evil ringleader.

*These guys seriously did this while I was gone...* With that being said, I figured if I were here, they would probably do something *even more* outrageous.

—*No, that can't be true.*

With that thought in mind, I continued my conversation with them.

"So that's why the place now looks like this."

"How about it? Isn't it cool, having an evil secret base?"

*Ah, just as I suspected. It really is a secret base.*

Veldora's source of information was mainly reproduced from my memories. That explained why the research facility looked the way it did, straight from manga and other sources. As a result, my intuition regarding the reasons behind his actions was often the right answer.

"Tsk, you guys sure were having fun by yourselves."

"GAHAHAHA! It's nothing really. What comes next is the important part. We will need your wisdom in the future."

"That's right, Rimuru! You always give us a scare. Now it's our turn to surprise you. Take a look at our research first before you share your opinion."

Hearing the accidental slip of my genuine thoughts, Veldora laughed out loud while Ramiris tried to comfort me.

I shouldn't sulk after what she said.

I regained my composure and followed the two into the facility.

A group of men clad in white coats were working tirelessly.

And in front of me was a moving miniature train.

This was what you called a "model train," though it was still large enough for an adult to ride on it.

"Yo, Young Master! Did that surprise you?"

It was none other than Kaijin. He was acting chief director, and he had on a rather unfitting white lab coat.

The hall was roughly the same size as a university auditorium, and the ground was marked with railways, making it impossible for people to stand around.

*There's models of mountains, valleys, and tunnels here were...made for aerodynamic analysis?*

"Indeed. As expected from Young Master to have seen through their purposes right away. Honestly, the impressive thing here is all of the talented researchers that have gathered in our nation. They managed to build such an amazing facility with ease."

Indeed, Kaijin had a point.

It was thanks to the engineers' collaboration that this groundbreaking facility had been created.

This three-dimensional model was created using magic. Kaijin made the masterpiece of a prototype train, currently running along on the track, and it was one of his best works yet.

"What's powering this train?"

I could have deciphered it using Raphael-sensei's 'Analyze and Assess,' but I asked about it on purpose.

"Steam," Kaijin replied with a grin.

I nodded in response. It was just as I thought.

Right now, horses provided the physical power for trains operating within our nation. These horses would pull the carriages as they slid along the track. Naturally, the total load capacity was about the same as horse-drawn carriages. Although it improved stability and helped reduce traffic, overall efficiency hadn't improved a significant amount.

There had been proposals for either golems or monsters to drag trains around, but these proposals ultimately could not solve the root of the problem.

The key was to develop a locomotive.

And its primary source of power was the steam engine.

Of course, it wouldn't use old world technology like burning coal. Rather, we tried to create an engine that utilized both the strengths of magic and science.

This was why we named it the magitrain.

The concept behind the magic engine was using magic to convert magicules into an energy source, which then provided the combustion energy that gave rise to steam—this was the basic magical mechanism. Perhaps this prototype could be called the 'Spirit Magic Core.' Even though it was a simple design, it still required sophisticated magical technology.

The laws that magic obeyed were drastically different than those that governed the natural world. It was difficult trying to observe any patterns from the former, due to its ability to grant effects purely by imagination.

For instance, let's say there was a lit candle inside a transparent glass container. The enclosed space would quickly consume oxygen and produce a high concentration of carbon dioxide. However, if the fire were made by magic, it would continue to burn regardless. As long as the mage's mana and the necessary magicules were still there, the magical fire wouldn't disappear. Naturally, the mage's mana had a finite limit, so the fire couldn't burn forever.

Through this experiment, we could see that magical flame was governed by laws different from that of the chemical reaction behind combustion. Therefore, even if you tried to apply the same phenomenon for another purpose, the reality was that it wouldn't work. Consequently, hardly anyone correlated magic to the laws of physics in this world.

With that being said, the magic here purely referred to elemental magic.

Spirit magic, which could be cast by borrowing the power of spirits, would not be manipulated by a mage's imagination. In other words, it was a magic that delivered the power of a spirit—a being whose existence was based on natural phenomena—in its original, purest form.

This meant that the fire caused by spirit magic would consume oxygen and generate carbon dioxide.

By the way, during my battle with Ifrit in the past, 'Great Sage' had warned me about causing a steam explosion. The reason why it could have potentially worked was because Ifrit's flames obeyed the same properties as fire in the natural world. Had it been elemental magic, which alters the laws of physics using magicules, my strategy undoubtedly wouldn't have worked.

This was the same reason why I could use spirit magic while inside the 'Holy Purification Barrier.'

There was one more thing.

In order to illuminate the cave inside, I once used 'Engraving Magic' to heat up metal, yet the light generated proved insufficient. Thus, I had Dold work on it and he changed it to another spell. Apparently, he devised a method of directly converting magicules into light by applying elemental magic.

Thanks to magic, there were some processes that could be completely bypassed for results. Yet, the downside was that there wasn't much interest behind analyzing the natural phenomenon in this world.

In order to recreate the technology of physical phenomenon, it would be better to utilize spirit magic, which also relied on the same type of physical phenomenon. And that was how I came up with the idea of incorporating spirits as the power source for the magic engine.

Kaijin was very impressed. "Sometimes, we would boil water with the excess heat from the fire at the smithery, but we never knew we could use steam this way."

I was more shocked at their technological capabilities as they were able to recreate steam engines solely from my explanations.

"All in all, there are a lot of methods to power it. For instance, using pistons, turbines, and steam—basically, it's using thermal energy to do either mechanical work or converting it into electricity. That will be our field of research in the future. It appears that the research in the piston mechanism is going rather smoothly," I commented.

"Ah, you're right, Young Master. If we can figure out how to work with electricity, then we can produce a great deal of power," agreed Kaijin, turning to the small train.

I have had discussions regarding electricity with Kaijin and the others before. They seemed to have done plenty of research since then, and now possessed some level of understanding.

I was starting to think that they knew more about it than I did.

Kaijin was gazing at the locomotive that had six trains attached to it. Each one was carrying some iron ingots. If this was the real deal, then it was capable of transporting a huge amount of weight efficiently.

“In this lab, we can recreate all sorts of different environments. We are currently in the tropical rainforest, but the room next door is the desert region. The room next to that is currently simulating a snowy region. We collect data individually from each room so that we can design trains for each environment,” Ramiris, who at some point had flown onto Treyni-san’s shoulders, described with a smile.

Even one of the vampires, with his shiny fangs, nodded vigorously after hearing this. “It’s truly wonderful that moi and the others are of some help. Moi loves these types of experiments.”

This happy go lucky guy was a bit of a weirdo. Rather than saying he enjoyed experimenting, he was more like a mad scientist who had no interest in anything else. But they genuinely had been of great help. He handed over his very neatly written notes. It was full of detailed remarks that filled up every single page.

By the way, the paper was made of plant fibers.

We could get more supplies if we started trading with the Eastern Empire, but right now, we did not have any trade interaction. Under these circumstances, I had asked them to start by researching paper.

Gabil’s subordinates were very good at monotonous work like that. And so, I assigned it to them, and they immediately developed a low-quality paper prototype made out of wood fibers. After that, they were on their own, but through a lot of trial and error, the paper quality quickly reached a good standard. Even though they did have physical samples, as well the necessary information about the steps to produce paper, this was still very impressive work.

I immediately praised them afterward.

Back to the topic of the important notes I was given.

There were a lot of questions, proposed solutions, experiments, and their subsequent outcomes. It was all very intriguing.

There were passages regarding motive power, and the required amount of magicules for generating it; a record of how long the engine managed to run and the accompanying deterioration; the estimated load capacity and the load conditions on the cargo bed. This allowed us to calculate the stability of the interior train, and even the extent of the train’s acceleration.

All of this data could be used as reference when we eventually built a full-scale locomotive. I hurriedly sped through everything, and it seemed that all the relevant theories had been completed.

Given the aforementioned information, we could actually start crafting a prototype—eh, could it be?!

“Oi, Veldora, when you mentioned ‘prototype,’ could it be that you weren’t referring to the model train, but something else?”

“Kukuku, how impressive. You really know your stuff to have noticed that,” Veldora laughed happily.

Ramiris, now sitting on *his* shoulder, had a smug look as well.

I glanced around the room and realized that all the researchers, Treyni-san and Beretta all had the same expressions.

Before I knew it, they had gathered and lined up next to a certain door.

In that case...

Kaijin began to explain as he slowly walked towards that door. “We went through a lot of trouble making it. Turns out summoning a fire spirit in the engine alone was not enough. We needed to control the power output and had to have actual workers stationed nearby. Therefore, each locomotive would need to be staffed with a qualified mage. We could start to train mages based on the number of trains planned for manufacture, but it would take too much time. That’s why we decided to build and install magic circuits in the train to automatically regulate it. The fire spirit, which is the engine’s ‘Core,’ and the control panel

engraved with 'Engraving Magic' that controls it; everything came together to give you the finished product."

He offhandedly mentioned about summoning spirits, but the process proved to be a major hindrance. Because lower spirits lacked enough power, mid-tier spirits, such as fire salamanders, had to be summoned at the very least.

A salamander's power could reach up to rank B-plus, which was impossible for any average person to summon.

*Is it because Ramiris is here after all?*

It likely had to do with the fact that she used to be the Queen of Spirits. It seemed that anything spirit-related was a piece of cake for her.

As I was left shocked, Kaijin put his hand on the door handle.

"Oh oh, this is..."

It was past the door.

It had a black, shiny, and somehow majestic appearance. It was clearly made of magisteel, but at the same time, it looked like a steel monster that gave off a dangerous aura.

While feeling impressed, I heard Vesta's proud declaration. "This is the culmination of our technologies, Magitrain Zero!"

I was under the impression that it was still in the experimental phase, yet there it was, completed. And even if it was just a prototype, this was the train that I dreamt of.

We managed to take one big first step forward.

"We will likely be testing the durability of the train's body. Not only do we plan to make freight cars, but also passenger cars, resting cars and dining cars."

"Honestly speaking, even the locomotive itself isn't finished yet. I'm trying to refine certain details and make it more complete."

Vesta and Kaijin were both filled with motivation as they spoke.

All the researchers were ardently gazing at Magitrain Zero, so I guess there was still room for improvement.

"There's also the electricity Rimuru mentioned; that one was a bit difficult. I had a wind spirit summoned to generate electricity, though we weren't able to use that energy directly..."

That was to be expected.

While electricity was indeed a versatile resource, it was also exceedingly difficult to control.

"First, we will need to develop batteries. Once we succeed, we will be able to utilize the locomotive's excess thermal energy to generate electricity. If we manage to do that, it will broaden the possibilities to make the train ride more comfortable. It's definitely worth trying."

While I barely understood anything on the matter, Raphael-sensei had translated my memories of technological textbooks from Earth into the local language, and then transcribed everything for me. I then handed the consolidated book to Vesta, assured that he was going to put them to good use.

It felt like the secondary use of it through magic, but it was very convenient.

"Indeed, that's how it is. I wanted to bring this up when you mentioned electricity back there, but in the end, I decided to do it after you saw it for yourself. After all, 'Seeing is believing.' Let's take a look."

*Could it be that they've already put electricity to practical use?*

With this thought in mind, I followed Kaijin.

I climbed in and was immediately met with surprise.

The inside of the locomotive was enveloped in a gentle halo of light.

I turned to Kaijin and conveyed with my eyes, "What's this about?"

"By the time Young Master handed me the data, I had already made my decision. Didn't you too, Vesta?"

"Of course. When Rimuru-sama handed the research regarding the application of electricity to us, Kaijin-dono and I studied the materials in detail. Even though there are still parts that I don't understand, with all these researchers under one roof, we were able to utilize everyone's wisdom."

“Well, that’s right. Everyone helped answer our questions and doubts. And, when I saw the Elemental Colossus of that little girl there—Ramiris-sama—I was truly surprised. A working product of our abandoned ‘Armored Soldier Project,’ right in front of me,” Kaijin recalled.

Indeed, that was the case.

If you had the real thing right in front of you, obviously you would get a better understanding of how it worked.

Right now, another Elemental Colossus was being built and was supposed to become a subject of research.

“Exactly. As I read that book and heeded varying opinions, I realized that we had a serious misinterpretation. Back then, we experimented under the belief that elemental magic and spirit magic were the same kind of magic. That was the source of our mistakes—”

“—So then, we deduced what we were lacking by investigating with the Elemental Colossus in front of us.”

What became clear with those results was that the law of magic completely changed depending on the magic.

As for Ramiris’s Elemental Colossus, instead of spirit magic, the summoned spirit itself was being used. Because Kaijin and the researchers tried to move the ‘Spirit Magic Core’ with elemental magic, they failed to initiate a chain reaction and thus wasn’t operating properly.

“—And yet, I ended up increasing the magic output. The result, the magic heat had nowhere to go, eventually grew out of control, and the experiment ended in a failure.”

I see, it was that kind of thing.

In Ramiris’s case, there was a possibility that she simply couldn’t use elemental magic, and thus her Elemental Colossus reflected that. But, as a result, that became the key to success. The Elemental Colossus’s power reactor was the ‘Spirit Magic Core,’ but as engineers gathered en masse, they seemed to have found a way to fully realize its performance capabilities. And by analyzing my ‘Master Core,’ the original ‘Spirit Magic Core’ was completed.

“I feel both happy and frustrated.”

“Yes, I wholly agree. To think that the theory we once gave up on was only due to a misunderstanding...”

Despite how much research they conducted, they couldn’t even see any signs of success with just the theory, but as soon as they clarified and fixed their mistake, they were able to finish and obtain results right away. It was so ridiculous, Kaijin and his team couldn’t help but laugh.

“What? If we have the ‘Spirit Magic Core,’ we could convert magicules into energy. Well, there are different types of energy, so it’s kind of hard to explain.”

“This locomotive is converting magicules into heat in order to turn the turbines. Thus, we can also generate the electricity that Rimuru-sama mentioned before, and illuminate each car like this, too.”

I was surprised.

No, I was genuinely surprised.

In other words, this train was powered by a fully completed ‘Spirit Magic Core.’ By giving magicules to spirits of various attributes, they would then convert the magicules into a more easily usable energy. Furthermore, they had the ability to circulate energy as well. They could send electricity made by the turbines to the ‘Spirit Magic Core’ and store it safely. Although the spirits were capable of directly generating electricity, Vesta and the others said that the method would be too difficult to control. Therefore, they decided to use the electricity generated in the steam engine instead.

After all, electricity wasn’t that great if it was high voltage. Not only did we need power plants, but also substations and a battery storage facility to actually hold the charge.

To think all that such a complicated process was handled solely by the ‘Spirit Magic Core’...

Moreover, with magicules already in the atmosphere, fuel wasn’t that big of a concern. If the concentration wasn’t high enough, all you needed to do was prepare magic stones, which were simple enough to carry around.

The continuous operating time was determined by the presence or absence of magicules. If the locomotive were a place where magicules were always present, and as long as it doesn't do anything strenuous, it technically could—maintenance definitely required—operate forever. It was like a dream come true.

"Come on, Rimuru, aren't you surprised?"

"We're like this when we get serious!"

Although it irritated me seeing Veldora and Ramiris brag like that, what they had achieved was admittedly astonishing. For now, let's just honestly praise them.

"No, it's amazing. Keep up the good work!"

"Hmm. Leave it to us!"

"Mhmm mhmm, just relax!"

I could understand Veldora and Ramiris's feeling of wanting to boast because I, too, felt like boasting to someone.

The day that trains began running through our country was drawing closer, and it wouldn't be long before the magitrain spread across the world. I couldn't help but feel excited.

"So, sir, I have one thing I wanted to discuss with you..."

"Yes, what is it?"

"No, you see, I wish to organize a little get-together to celebrate the completion of Magitrain Zero. So, you know..."

*I see, it's a get-together in name, but what you really want is to eat, drink and play to your heart's content, right?*

I couldn't exactly say no, so we wound up at one of my favorite nightclubs.

Well, whatever.

"All right! Let's drink the night away!"

"Thank you so much! That high-class bar is a place that your honor manages, so I couldn't just rent it out as I want," said Kaijin, smiling with anticipation.

That place certainly wasn't the kind of establishment where we could visit in large groups and make a lot of noise. But even before that, we wouldn't have been able to fit this many people inside anyway.

For Kaijin, it wasn't about the money either.

"I'll have them get you a seat outside the restaurant as well. We'll turn away the other customers for this evening and hold a recognition-of-service party for the research employees here."

We had known each other after all this time. There was no such thing as a "get-together." I had decided to hold a recognition-of-service party, with me paying for everything, as a token of my gratitude to everyone. Or rather, if I had to be honest, I didn't care what the name was.

Alcohol was best for celebrations.

Whether it was a get-together or a recognition-of-service party, as long as you had a good time, it was all the same.

Thankfully, this was a city of elves famous for its pleasure gardens.

*Let's all share the joy we feel and nourish our spirits for the future.*

"KUA-HA HA HA! The conversation is flowing well!"

" "Thank you for the food, Your Majesty Rimuru!" " "

Going along with Veldora, who was in a good mood, the researchers promptly showed their gratitude with a bow. It was such a unified movement that it made me wonder if they had regularly practiced it. Also, the vampires apparently didn't need fresh blood, judging by the fact that they were enjoying the alcohol too. They took part in it like it was natural.

And apart from that—

"This is exciting! I, too, get to drink alcohol for free today!"

"Oh my, that's great. But please be careful not to drink too much—"

"No, Ramiris-sama. I have been ordered by Rimuru-sama to prohibit children from drinking."

Attempting to use the hustle and bustle as a distraction, the little fairy tried to sneak a drink, but was prevented in the end, of course.