

CHAPTER 1

MY FIRST FRIEND

It was dark. Too dark to see anything. Where was I? What even happened, for that matter? Someone was picking on me for being a celibate sage or something, and then…

That was enough to jump-start my mind again.

My name was Satoru Mikami. Just another thirty-seven-year-old in a suit. And when I shoved my coworker aside on the street, some random maniac stabbed me. Good. I remembered all of that. Which meant I must be fine. No need for panic. That wasn’t like me anyway. I was known for having a cool head. The last time I panicked, it was grade school and all I did was wet my pants, just a little bit.

I tried looking at my surroundings. Then I noticed—I couldn’t open my eyes. Odd, I thought as I tried to rub them and my arms didn’t respond. And more to the point, Where’s my head, anyway?

This was getting confusing. Like, whoa. Wait a sec. I needed some time to deal with this.

Whenever I start freaking out, I always find it helpful to sit still and start counting prime numbers until I calm down. Let’s try that. One, two, three—

Wait, one doesn’t count as a prime number, does it?

Ugh… Now wasn’t the time for this. I couldn’t let myself think about this stupid crap. This was bad, wasn’t it? Like, what’s going on, here?! Was I…like, past the point of no return, unless I did something?

Panicking, I checked to see whether I was hurt anywhere. I didn’t seem to be. Physically, I felt terrific. No cold, no heat—perfectly comfortable. That, at least, came as a relief. Now for my hands and legs… Oop. Not so hot there. No response from any of my limbs. What’s up with that? Getting stabbed in the back wouldn’t force the doctors to amputate all my extremities, would it? I’d kind of like those back.

Then there was the whole “can’t open my eyes” thing. I was in a world of darkness, where I couldn’t see a thing. An anxiety like none I’d ever felt before began welling up in my mind.

Am I…in a coma or something?

I was conscious, certainly, but had I gotten detached from my central nervous system, maybe?

Oh, man, anything but that! I mean, think about it. When you throw a guy into a dark, enclosed space, it takes practically no time at all for him to go insane. And that was exactly where I was—and I couldn’t even die in peace any longer, it looked like. If insanity was all that waited for me here, that was enough to take the wind out of anybody’s sails.

Just then, I felt something brush against my body. Hmm? What’s that? I focused all of my senses on this unknown sensation. It felt like grass against what might have been the side of my stomach. Concentrating on the sensations, I slowly began sussing out what was around me. I could feel the pointy edges of some nearby leaves prick against my body.

It made me a little happy, really. I was in total darkness a moment ago, but now I had my sense of touch back, at least. It made me so overjoyed that I made a beeline for the grass, and—

Creep.

I could feel my body sliding flat against the ground. I… I moved?!

This, at least, was clear evidence that I was not on any kind of hospital bed. The feeling beneath my stomach (?) took the form of hard, jagged rock. Hmm. It still didn’t make much sense to me, but I appeared to be outdoors.

So I headed toward the grass, keeping my senses keen against what I touched, although I still wasn’t quite clear on where my head was. There was nothing to smell; I wasn’t sure whether I had that sense or not.

Really, I had no idea what I was shaped like. I felt…flowing. Jellylike. Kind of like a certain fantasy monster I was well familiar with. In fact, the idea had been running through my head for a while now.

…No. Come on. That’s just silly. Anything but that. I decided to leave that anxiety-inducing prospect behind for the time being and instead try out the final, untested one of my five human senses. Not that I knew where my mouth was. So…now what?

Suddenly, a voice ran across my mind.

Use unique skill “Predator”?

Yes

No

Huh? Wh-what? Unique skill “Predator”?

And what was up with that voice? I thought I heard something weird when I was talking with Tamura earlier. That wasn’t just me imagining things? Was someone there? Something didn’t seem quite right with it. It wasn’t that I thought I had a visitor, so much as…well, as I just had words floating into my mind. Cold, unfeeling words, like a computer-generated voice.

Let’s go with no for now.

No response. I waited a while for one, but no further voices came. It appeared there wouldn’t be a second question. Did I make the wrong choice? Was this the kind of game where you got stuck if you didn’t start giving “yes” answers? I was assuming the question would just repeat forever until I said yes, like any normal RPG. Guess not.

Kind of rude of that voice, though. Showing up, asking a simple question, then disappearing forever. It was nice hearing someone for a change, but…the hell, man?

Oh well. Let’s go on with what I was trying before. My sense of taste.

I moved toward the grass I felt earlier. As it brushed up against me, I leaned forward, feeling the whole of my weight settle over the field. It was definitely grass of some sort.

Once I was sure of that, I suddenly realized that the area where the plants met my body was starting to melt. I thought it was myself melting at first, but apparently it was only the grass. And with that, I could now tell that the components of the plant life beneath me were being taken into my body.

So that was how it worked? Instead of having a mouth to eat with, I just ingested plant matter with my whole body? It sure didn’t taste like anything.

From this, there were a few conclusions I could sensibly make.

First, I was no longer human. That was a given by now. So did I really get stabbed to death? It didn’t seem like much of an open question at this point. It’d also explain why I was resting on a rocky patch of grass instead of in a hospital room.

What happened to Tamura? To Sawatari? Did he scramble my hard drive for me, like he promised? I was full of questions—but also a suspicion that, by this point, none of them really mattered anymore. I had to think about what came next.

So…is this it? Am I really a… You know… With the kind of tactile feedback I’m getting at the moment…

I trained my senses back inside my body. It responded with a rhythmic motion. Boing. Sproing. Slowly, inside the total darkness, I took the time to ascertain the exact boundaries of my form.

…Heavens! I used to be such a handsome, attractive man, and now I’m so…fluid! So aerodynamic!

…Yeah, right! You think I’d accept this just like that?!

As far as I could feel, there was no longer any doubting it. I could picture it in my mind.

I mean…what else could it be? Not like I had a prejudice against it. Hell, it was kinda cute, if anything!

But was it for me, though? If you took a poll, I think at least nine out of ten people would have the same answer.

I would just have to accept it, though. Accept the fact that my “soul,” or whatever you want to call it, had been reborn inside a monster from another world. The odds of such a thing seemed astronomically low to me, but…



But I’d been reborn. As a slime.

Munch, munch.

Munch, munch, munch, munch.

I just snacked on some grass.

Why did I do that? Well, why not?

Not like I had anything else to do!

It had been a few days or so since I was pretty much forced to accept the fact that I was now a slime. How many, I wasn’t exactly clear on. The passage of time is tough to pick up on when all you can see is total darkness.

One discovery I had stumbled upon over the past few days was that a slime’s body could be way more useful than at first sniff. I never got hungry, for one, nor did I get tired. Food and sleep, for me, were wholly unnecessary. And I had divined something else, too. I couldn’t be completely sure, but there didn’t seem to be anything else living around here. In terms of danger, I wasn’t sure there was any to speak of. My days were blissfully free of worry.

Or anything else, really.

The whole time, I never heard that voice again. By this point, I wouldn’t have minded a little companionship. But no. It was just me, the grass, and me eating it for lack of much else to do. It was simply a way to kill time. And by this point, I could sense the entire process—my body absorbing the blades, dismantling them internally, sorting through all the components, and storing them away.

What it all meant, I couldn’t say. It was starting to frighten me a bit. I needed to do something, or I’d lose my mind. So I kept going through the cycle—absorb, break down, store up. But there was something odd about the process. Elimination never factored into it, somehow. Not even once. Maybe slimes didn’t need to do that. Hell, not like I’d know either way. But where was all this stuff I was ingesting going, then? My senses told me that my form hadn’t changed in any appreciable manner from when I first arrived.

So what the hell?

Received. It is being stored in the stomach of the unique skill “Predator.” Current physical space usage is less than one percent.

What? Whoa! It speaks!

But since when was I using any skills? I thought I answered no back there.

Received. The unique skill “Predator” is not being used. The matter being ingested into your body is set to automatically be stored in your stomach. This can be changed as needed.

Oh? Well, nice to see we’re having a real back-and-forth, finally. But back to business. If I use this skill, what happens then?

Received. The unique skill “Predator” chiefly comprises the following five effects:

Predation:

Takes the target into your body. Lesser chance of success if the target has its own consciousness. Can be targeted on organic and inorganic objects, as well as skills and magic.

Analysis:

Analyzes and researches targets taken into your body. Lets you create craftable items. If the required materials are present, allows you to make a copy of the item. Successful Analysis of the casting method allows you to learn the target’s skills and magic.

Stomach:

Stores the Predated target. Can also store materials created via Analysis. Items stored in your stomach are unaffected by time.

Mimicry:

Reproduces the form and skills of absorbed targets. Only available once the target has been Analyzed.

Isolate:

Stores harmful effects incapable of being analyzed, neutralizing them and breaking them down into magical force.

Um… What?

For the first time in a while, I was thrown. That sounded like kind of an incredible ability. Not exactly the kind of thing slimes were known for. At least not the ones I knew.

And…hang on. Who was this voice answering my questions, anyway? Was someone there?

Received. This is the effect of the unique skill “Great Sage.” The skill has taken effect, making it more immediately available.

A sage, huh…? And here I thought that voice was just screwing with me. Now it was the best partner I had. Hope that keeps up.

Hell, anything would have been fine at that point. As long as it helped smooth out the endless solitude I was preparing myself for. For all I knew, this “voice” was something my mind had crafted to keep my marbles intact. It was fine by me. For the first time in ages, I could feel a burden lifting from my heart.

By my count, it had been ninety days since I was reincarnated as a slime.

To be more precise, ninety days, seven hours, thirty-four minutes, and fifty-two seconds. How was I so sure about this? Turned out that was one of the many side effects of evoking that “Great Sage” skill.

Holy cats, was that thing helpful. Talk about your best friend in a pinch. Any question that popped to mind, it instantly provided the answer.

According to this Sage, it took ninety days for the skill to fully fuse itself with my soul. Normally, it would be unable to provide responses in the form of conversation, but in order to answer my questions, it apparently revamped itself, diverting part of its “World Language” powers to assist me. That’s how it was explained to me, at least.

This useful ability—relaying words into my mind—isn’t normally possible. As it explained to me, this “World Language” was heard only when there were great changes to the world or when you either earned or upgraded a skill—something that normally didn’t happen all that often. These skills were obtained only rarely, when the world recognized that you had grown in one way or another.

Evolution, meanwhile, was something most people never got to experience in their lives. It was all Greek to me, but if that was how it was, I was willing to accept it.

So the Great Sage was answering my questions at the moment, but otherwise it was this totally passive thing. No real sentience or anything. Unless I spoke up, it would never talk to me of its own volition. That was the only real drawback, but tossing words around with someone again was a wonderful feeling, even if it was a one-way street.

Although, back in my home world, having a conversation with my own skill might have been considered strange…

So there I was, still locked in darkness, asking a barrage of questions.

One thing the replies confirmed was that yes, I was a slime now. I also found out why I never got hungry or sleepy. The slimes in this world, it turned out, never had to eat if they could keep absorbing the magic particles, or “magicules,” in the air. In less magically abundant regions, I would be obliged to fill up by absorbing monsters or small creatures.

Most slimes shied away from areas with low magic presences, but the ones that didn’t were apparently both quite strong and madly vicious. Usually it was the other way around, where a wealth of local magic meant especially strong monsters.

In other words, the area I took up residence in was so laden with magic that I didn’t even have to eat.

As for the sleep question:

Received. The body of a slime consists of a mass of completely identical cells. Each individual cell may function as a brain cell, a nerve cell, or a muscle cell. Since the operational cells used for thought are rotated in and out at regular intervals, there is no need for you to sleep.

This raised the question of where my memories were being held, exactly. Maybe it was kind of like a RAID setup on a computer?

That would be close enough, came the response. Considering its lack of personality, the Sage certainly came up with some snappy replies.

Speaking of which, the “Great Sage” skill consisted of five effects:

Hasten Thought:

Boosts perception speed by a thousand times.

Analyze and Assess:

Analyzes and assesses the target.

Parallel Operation:

Operates on any matter you wish to analyze, separating it from the regular thought process.

Cast Cancel:

Annuls the casting period required when using magic, et cetera.

All of Creation:

Provides full coverage of all unsuppressed matter and phenomena in this world.

“All of Creation”? So I know about everything, everywhere, with no effort on my part? Score! Or so I thought.

It turned out that I could only be told information related to things I’d already heard about—in other words, I needed to recognize and understand a concept before I could grab a full Analysis of it.

And the spell thing—did that mean I could instantly use any magic once I learned it? And, like, there was magic in this world and stuff?!

The Great Sage replied with a big Yes.

Well, once I knew that, I just had to try to learn a few spells myself.

I checked with the Sage to see if it could help me cast magic, but that was a no-go. Eh, it was worth a shot.

Still, I had another great idea: Could I link the “Predator” Analysis skill with “Great Sage” Parallel Operation?

Received. It is possible to link “Predator” Analysis with “Great Sage” Parallel Operation. Do you wish to link them?

Yes

No

Uh, yeah? Not that I had anything to analyze yet… Wait. Or did I? That grass in my stomach. The stuff I had been eating to pass the time. What was that? Not like I had anything else to do. Let’s give it a try.

Off you go, Sage.

………

……

…

Analysis complete.

Hipokute herbs:

A type of ingredient used in healing medication. Only thrives in areas blessed with high local magic densities. Fusing its juice with magicules produces recovery medicine. Grinding the blades and fusing them with magicules produces a salve that closes wounds.

Wow! That was what I’d been snacking on? Talk about an unexpected windfall. I immediately set out to create some medicine of my very own. The process took place inside my body, so it didn’t really feel much like crafting, but the Analysis took less than a second, and within another three-ish, I had my very first potion. Five minutes, and I could’ve had a hundred. And while I didn’t have anything else to compare it to, using my Great Sage skills to assess them resulted in a “high quality” rating.

So there you go. I was happy enough with it, at least. It all went so fast, too. I asked the Sage about it, and it said the process usually took more time than that. Linking it with Parallel Operation must’ve been the right idea, I suppose.

To test that theory out, I unlinked it long enough to create a single potion. It took fifty minutes. Damn, that was slow. Looks like I had the foresight to stumble across some mega-compatible skills to combine. Not that I knew what I was doing at all.

Some of your garden-variety weeds were also sprouting here and there, but most of the local grasses were hipokute. How ’bout that? So I decided, as a little insurance, to Predate all the herbs I could in the area and turn my stomach into a little recovery-potion factory. I didn’t have much else to occupy my time. It was still pitch black in here.

There was no doubt about it. I had put my guard down. I had a partner who granted me skills and the ability to engage in (kind of passive) conversation, and I let it get to my head.

I suppose that had a lot to do with how for ninety days in a row, I never ran into any other creatures. No danger to my life whatsoever. But either way, I had let my guard down.

For an instant, I was like, “Huh?”

I felt a sudden sensation that I had grown lighter or heavier or, like…unstable.

Did I…fall in some water?

In the past ninety days, I hadn’t felt so much as a drop of water hit my body. I’d assumed I was in a rain-free cave or some other kind of shelter, so I had never even entertained the possibility before.

I had probably slipped into a river or something. Rivers don’t exist indoors, so maybe it was some kind of underground creek in this cave I was in…? Up to now, I had been careful with every step I took, making sure everything remained steady in the darkness. But after learning about my skills, getting full of myself, and using Predation to eat a pasture’s worth of grass, I had stopped paying attention to what was under me.

I was always like that. Getting cocky, then screwing it all up in the end. I’d proclaim to a customer, “Oh, absolutely! That won’t be any problem at all!” and then have hell to pay. It had happened over and over. I still remember the spiteful looks the rest of my team gave me for it.

Too bad I didn’t think to stop myself in time. What kind of idiot runs off into parts unknown when they can’t even see? If I survived this, I was gonna give myself what for. Of course, given my personality, I doubted I’d learn anything from it.

It was funny how serenely I was handling this whole thing, though. Not like I had much in the form of arms or legs I could flail about in horrified panic…

Guess it’s over, then. Pretty short lifetime—even by slime standards, maybe. I said my final prayers, awaiting my inevitable suffocation.

………

……

…

Suffocation never came.

Why not? Did I not fall in the water? Time to call on the Sage, maybe.

Received. A slime’s body operates exclusively on magicules. Oxygen is unnecessary, and therefore, so is breathing. That is why you have not been engaging in that behavior.

Oh… Right. I wasn’t paying attention, but I guess there wasn’t any breathing, was there? Made sense. Even after ninety days, I was still learning something new!

But now wasn’t the time to celebrate. I had fallen into water, and even if I wouldn’t die, it did still put me in kind of a bind. What now? I couldn’t really tell whether I was floating or sinking. My lack of limbs precluded any attempt at swimming. Would I wind up at the bottom sooner or later and be able to creep my way back to the surface? Or was I doomed to bob around in the middle of the current, never reaching much of anywhere?

Though, if anything, it felt less like a violent torrent and more like I was being rocked in a cradle. Very gently rocked. It felt pretty good, even…

Something told me this wasn’t flowing water after all. Maybe it was a lake, not a river. I didn’t feel as though I was being taken anywhere. I was just kind of bobbing up and down, like a plastic bag, and it didn’t feel as if I’d ever hit bottom. If things stayed this way, I was in big trouble.

What now?

Just then, my brain cells—or my slime body, I guess—came up with an ingenious plan. Maybe I could go all Predator on this water and then spit it out for some water-jet propulsion. Would that work? Only one way to find out. Not like I could do anything else.

So I started drinking, filling my Predator stomach up to approximately 10 percent of its capacity. Then, I expelled it like I was wringing out my stomach.

The sense of release was exhilarating.

Suddenly, I heard a voice in my mind:

Water Pressure Propulsion skill acquired.

It was the first time I recognized it. This had to be the so-called World Language. There was no mistaking it, since the Sage spoke only when spoken to, but the two voices did sound exactly the same.

But I didn’t have a moment to ponder over this. The more pressure I applied on the water, the more pressure I felt on myself, and I was rocketing forward at astonishing speed, as if I was about to launch myself into the sky. The acceleration was intense. Honestly, maybe it was a good thing I couldn’t see. Instead, I just basked in the sensation of my body zipping along through the darkness.

Well, let me clarify. If I could’ve seen my surroundings, I’m sure the fear would’ve been intense…but not being able to see was just as terrifying.

If you’ve ever been on a roller coaster in an amusement park in total darkness, perhaps you’d understand the feeling. My mind flashed back to my previous life and the single day I spent visiting a certain paradise under the rule of a certain rodent. At least his magical dreamland offered safety harnesses.

By this point, I wanted to punch myself for coming up with the idea. And trying it out right after thinking it up? Come on, man! What happened to some kind of, you know, preliminary safety check?

The terror was starting to affect my train of thought. How long would I keep accelerating? How much water did I spit out, anyway?

As that thought occurred to me, I felt my body crash headlong into something and bounce off it. I braced myself for a wave of paralyzing pain. Which never came.

Huh? Shouldn’t that have, like, damaged me? Or did it damage me, and I just didn’t feel it or whatever?

Received. You have acquired Cancel Pain, which interrupts the creation of pain. Your Resist Melee Attack has reduced the amount of damage taken. The amount of damage your body has incurred is ten percent. The intrinsic slime skill Self-Regeneration has taken effect. Would you like to support it with your Predator unique skill?

Yes

No

Oh, so I was hurt a little, then? Made sense. I wasn’t sure whether this was a good or bad thing, but as long as I knew something was up, then maybe I didn’t need to feel pain after all. It’d make certain things easier.

Predator support, though, huh? I don’t really get it, but sure. “Yes.”

At that moment, I was greeted with the feeling that I had suddenly lost some of my body mass. After a while, I felt it return. My damaged parts had been Predated, analyzed, and repaired. Talk about a useful body to have. I should try testing later to see how much of it I can afford to lose before I’m KO’d. It was way too dangerous to mess with in detail, but I guess I could afford to go without at least a bit of it at a time, so…

Something told me I was getting a little too careful, anyway. I had a stockpile of recovery potions, which I didn’t even have to use. And I would’ve figured losing a tenth of my body would be a pretty serious issue, but now I knew I could just regenerate it in the space of ten seconds. Next time I was damaged, I’d try using those potions.

So where am I, I wonder? Making sure my body was back to normal, I checked out my surroundings. No telling what kind of dangerous monsters might be nearby. I was out of the water, but maybe there were scary, scaly things waiting for me on the other side.

Slowly, carefully, I started taking action.

It kind of seemed as if whenever I did something “carefully,” it meant I was about to be exposed to a heap of danger. I was sure it was just my mind playing tricks on me, though.

And that thought probably did me no favors, because…

Can you hear me, little one?

I heard something.

Little one? It’s probably not anyone besides me, is it?

It wasn’t a voice, exactly, but something I could recognize more directly and instinctually in my mind. I didn’t have any ears to listen with anyway.

Hello! You can hear me, can you not? Respond to me!

Well, no shit! But how was I supposed to reply without any mouth? As an experiment, I tried thinking Shut up, baldy! in my mind—not like this guy could hear it or anything. But how was I gonna get anywhere here if I couldn’t even give a—

…Oh-ho! You dare to call me bald, do you…? Rather a lot of nerve packed into such a little body, no? I had hoped to give my first guest in quite a while a little kindness, but it would seem you are in rather a hurry to die!

Uh-oh. Geez, could’ve warned me that would work first. And I had no idea who I was dealing with, either. Well, that was it. My loss. Time for an apology.

I’m sorry! I didn’t know how to reply to you, so I just tried saying the first thing that came to mind! I’m really sorry about that! I can’t see anything right now, so I have no idea what you even look like!

Did that come across? Kind of rude to call this guy bald when I couldn’t even see him, I supposed. If he was, I’d probably just pushed some very delicate buttons.

Heh-heh-heh… Eh-ha-ha. Ahh-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

The resulting laugh came in three distinct levels. A masterpiece. So were we cool now, or—?

How fascinating. I had assumed you reacted as such upon seeing me, but you cannot, eh? Most slimes are low-level monsters, incapable of conscious thought as they run through the cycle of absorption, division, and regeneration. It is the rare one, indeed, that ever leaves its habitat.

Now what was he talking about? Was he more curious than angry, then, or…? Either way, this was my first contact with another intelligent being. The first conversation in my new, oozy life. I wanted to keep it a friendly one.

You had aroused my curiosity, slime, by the way you so eagerly slammed into my body. The regenerative powers you just showed astonish me. Are you a named monster, perhaps, or a unique?

A what? And a what? Say again? I’m sorry, I don’t get what you mean. I’ve only been alive here for ninety days…

Hmm. I suppose, with your sentience, you were never destined to be merely a slime. Named monsters are those who have been assigned an exclusive name. But only ninety days? Ridiculous. Are you a unique, then?

“Unique” meaning…?

A unique monster is an individual who has suddenly attained unusual abilities, akin to mutation. They are occasionally born in areas with high magical concentrations… Perhaps you were born from the mass of magicules that leaked out from me, then?

Muh? What the heck?

Let’s try using my previous-world knowledge to suss this out. This guy (I’ll call him a guy for convenience’s sake) had been leaking magic all over the local area. It was so thick, in fact, that it gave birth to a monster. A slime. Me. Was that it?

Hmm. No monster has ever come close to approaching my domain in the past three hundred years. If you were born from my magical force, then perhaps, indeed, that gave you the power to touch me and live to tell the tale!

Oh… So you’re kind of, like, my dad, then?

No, not your parent by blood. I have no reproductive ability to speak of. Some monsters do, and some do not, you see.

Really? ’Cause I thought that kind of came with the package by default. But if I just spontaneously burst out from magic or whatever, maybe you don’t need it, huh?

…Your intellectual abilities surprise me. Very few, indeed, are the monsters that possess anything of the sort. Among all the monsters, only magic-born have sentience in the way you or I would understand it.

The commentary went on for a while. But the most important thing to learn from it was that apparently humans existed in this world, too. Then there were nonhumans, species very close to mankind in nature and similarly gifted with reproductive abilities. These included races like elves, hobbits, dwarves, and other fairy types, and generally they were allied with the humans.

Alongside that, you had races like goblins, orcs, lizardmen, and so on, which were hostile toward mankind and treated like monsters as a result. This animosity wasn’t inherent to their biology, however, so crossbreeding was entirely possible.

Next were the “magic-born people”—the catchall term for those who came into being from magic itself, monsters who experienced sudden mutation, and sentient beings evolved from animals or magical beasts. They had both intelligence and reproductive ability, but only within their own subspecies. In their upper social castes existed titans, vampires, devils, and other longer-lived species—all equally capable of having offspring, although they rarely did so, since their overwhelming magic force caused them to be nigh immortal, obviating the need to leave descendants.

These diverse intelligent, reproducing species were hostile to mankind and collectively referred to as the “magic-born race.” And reading between the lines, the impression I got was that the magic-born weren’t so much overtly hostile toward humans as the humans feared and coveted their powers. It remained true, though, that both sides were fighting for their own living spaces.

These sundry monsters had been classified by levels of danger. The upper ranks of the magic-born were packed with some pretty powerful buggers—all capable of leveling a human town solo if they felt like it. Not the kinds of guys you’d want to hang around.

So my new companion kept going for a while—about how he’d fought against the upper-level magic-born in the past and so on. Finally, the subject turned back to me.

As I told you, then, I lack the ability to produce offspring. The reason is simple… Because I do not need to. I am of the dragon race—one of only four in the world, both unique and the most perfect of my kind. You will hereby know me as Veldora, the Storm Dragon! My life span is infinite, my flesh unfathomable! As long as my will remains intact, I shall be ever alive! Ahhhhh-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!!

He could’ve skipped the laughter. I got it. So he didn’t need to have kids, because he was gonna live forever, right?

And while this guy took a while to get to the point, he did mention something I didn’t want to overlook.

Veldora was the Storm…Dragon?

Plus, if he liked taking a good-natured swipe at upper-level magic-born now and then, he was…like, pretty tough, wasn’t he?

Using my knowledge of Earth stuff, I tried to picture Veldora the Storm Dragon, no doubt seated in front of me right now. I didn’t like what my mind came up with. He seemed to be acting polite with me, and that made it all the creepier.

So what now…?

W-wow, really? Well, thanks for all that handy guidance, sir! Guess I better be on my way, then!

I tried my best to flee.

Halt. I have told you all about myself. It is your turn now, would you not agree?

I probably shouldn’t have expected any other treatment. Hmmmm. He wanted to know about me? If I told him about my miraculous journey from an alien planet, would he believe me? He seemed to marvel at how smart I was for a slime—if I tried to make something up, I doubted he’d fall for it. Such an attempt seemed like a good way to dig my own grave.

Well, whatever. If he didn’t believe me, I’d deal with it then. Summoning my resolve, I told Veldora everything that had happened to me so far.

………

……

…

So… Yeah. Here I am, I guess! It’s been super rough, y’know?

While prudently keeping the topic of my skills unexplored, I regaled the dragon with my tale of being stabbed, waking up as a slime, and everything else that happened on the way to his domain.

It was a bit weird how…well, non-rough it all sounded when I put it into words. But it was rough for me all the same. And the worst part was how I was literally operating blind the entire way. If some cute lady passed me on the road later on, would I ever get to see her? The thought saddened me a little.

Hmm. So a transmigrant, then? Your origins are quite rare, indeed.

Huh? Are they? And you… “Transmigrant”? This isn’t any big surprise to you?

What’s with that reaction? So these “transmigrants” were common enough that he had a name for them? What was so rare about it, then?

Hmph. You do see transmigrants, on occasion. Their memories from the past are burned into their souls, due to a powerful will. There are some, indeed, who retain every memory of their past lives. But a transmigrant from another world… That is quite uncommon. A regular soul, by itself, would have no hope of surviving a journey across realms. It would dissolve midway, taking its memories with it. Someone retaining their full mind and becoming reborn as a monster out of pure magic… I cannot recall any past example of that. Quite…peculiar, indeed.

Transmigrants from other worlds, it seemed, kept only part of their memories at best. Someone like me, who still had them all, was pretty well unheard of—not that I cared too much.

He had just told me something I couldn’t afford to ignore. A soul, “by itself”…? So you could travel to this world without getting reincarnated or anything?

Huh. Am I that unusual? ’Cause it sure doesn’t feel that way… Are there people, then, who come here from other worlds without being trans-whatevered?

There are. None have succeeded in traveling to another world from here, but there are more than a few that have completed their travels here from elsewhere. They are known as “visitors,” or “otherworlders,” and they bear knowledge of things that do not exist in this world. They acquire, as I hear it, some manner of special power when they make the journey here. Beyond that, there are records of transmigrants, who—as I said—bear knowledge of other worlds. Not all of them choose to openly identify themselves as such, though, I imagine.

Interesting. I didn’t know whether they came from the same planet I did, but it might be good to chat with them a bit. There might even be some from Japan, for all I knew. It was probably best for my sanity to have a goal while I was here, besides.

I see, I see! In that case, I think I’ll try and track down some of these “otherworlders,” as you called them. Maybe I’ll find someone from my own land!

Well, one moment. You said you cannot see, yes?

Oh, uh, yeah. And? It was a pain in the ass, yes, but as long as I took my time and kept from getting myself killed, I was sure I’d run into some fellow visitors. Probably.

Let me help you see, then.

Um, what? Damn. This guy… I mean, Veldora the Storm Dragon… He was acting way too nice to me, wasn’t he? Could I really trust him?

Uh, really?

Indeed. On one condition, however. What do you say?

I didn’t like the sound of that, but…ah, what the hell.

What kind of condition?

A simple one. When I grant you the ability of sight, I beg of you not to fear me. That, and I bid you come visit and speak to me again. That is all. I trust my terms are agreeable to you?

That’s all? Was he sure? What a lonely dragon. Guess there was no one else around at the top. No wonder he couldn’t stop talking to me—I must’ve been his first conversational partner in ages.

If I’d had my druthers, I would have said this dragon was a total pushover. He might’ve been feeding me a line this whole time, even, saying he was a dragon. Maybe the dragons in this world weren’t even all that powerful in the first place.

Heh. This was a pretty good deal.

Is that really all you need?

Yes. To be honest with you, I was sealed away in here three hundred years ago. Ever since then, I have had so much free time on my hands, I was practically out of my mind with boredom. What do you think?

Well, if that’s all you need, you got yourself a deal!

Good. It is a promise, then…and I trust you will hold up your end of the bargain.

Of course! Maybe I don’t look it, but you can count on me, man! Just ask anybody on Earth! They’ll vouch for me!

Hopefully he wouldn’t try to. That would be bad.

Very well. There is a skill known as Magic Sense. Can you use it?

Oh, here we go again. More walls for me to deal with. So unfair.

No, I can’t. What kind of skill is that?

It allows you to perceive the particles of magic floating around you. It is not a very powerful skill, and all it offers is a visual reference, so it is not difficult to acquire.

Oh… Sounds easy enough.

Indeed. I can wield it as easily as I can breathe. I hardly even bother to think about it.

Really? So once I learn that, I’ll be able to see again?

Precisely. This world is covered in sheer magic, although it is not spread evenly across its entire surface. Did you know, also, that light and sound both have the properties of a wave?

Yeah, I’ve heard about that. Light waves and sound waves.

Ah. How intelligent of you. Did you learn of that in your past world? You must have, I wager. But, indeed, you will be able to observe how these waves disturb the nearby particles of magic, then use that information to calculate how the area around you looks and sounds. Simple, yes?

Um? Not really? What kind of BS was that? I, um, I’m not really sure whether that sounds simple or not, actually…

No? But that is what allows one to continue fighting even after losing both their sight and hearing! It protects you from surprise attacks, and that is all but a requirement for survival here, is it not?

Y-yeah, but…can we skip all that fighting talk and just get me seeing again, maybe?

Mmm… Very well. Allow me to help you acquire this skill, then. This is the only method I am aware of.

W-wait, can you do that? I’m kind of a newborn here…

Worry not. You do have your memories from your past life, yes? And there, you gained knowledge about the nature of light and sound. Without that, not even I could help you, I wager. Luck is on your side, truly.

True. I supposed it would be hard to explain sight to someone who can’t see at all. I certainly couldn’t manage it. I read somewhere that Helen Keller learned how to speak only by following cues she learned before going deaf at age two. Maybe I could use my knowledge of Earth to harness this “Magic Sense” thing to figure out what the world around me was like…

Worth a shot, I guessed. This blindness was getting to be a massive pain. Plus, I had the Sage on my side. It could work this out.

I’m ready to learn, sir!

Now, now, no need for such ardor. It is quite simple. First, try moving the magic around you with the force in your body.

I had an inkling of what he meant. It was the skill I’d probably adapted to blow myself out of the water a moment ago.

Like this?

I tensed up, trying to imagine the strength circulating through my body. I could feel something moving within—the magicules my companion was talking about. I hadn’t been conscious of it in the water, but it looked as though I could adjust the force by how much I tensed up. Before, I hadn’t been controlling the water so much as I was controlling the magic dancing around in it. I was exercising my magical muscles, and the particles around me were reacting. It came to me surprisingly quickly.

Mmm. You are more gifted in this than I thought. Now, do you see the difference between the magic moving within you and that outside of your body?

Whoa. Maybe this actually was easy. Maybe I was more sensitive to the magic I absorbed now that I was conscious of the way I lived off it.

Well, sure! Like, that’s the stuff I’ve been eating all along, right?

Heh-heh-heh! If you understand that much, the rest is child’s play. All it takes is feeling the movements of the particles outside of you.

Yeah, that I didn’t get. But I gave it a shot, doing as I was told and feeling out the particles surrounding me. And I found I could.

I could sense them hanging in the air, riding air currents, moving around—all sorts of sensations.

Let’s ask the Sage about this.

Confirmed. Extra skill “Magic Sense”…successfully acquired. Use the extra skill Magic Sense?

Yes

No

Huh? It was that easy?

Well, sure—yes, then… Man, talk about a rock I can rely on!

The moment I invoked Magic Sense, my brain was filled with new information. A massive amount, something my human brain never could’ve processed—the waves of light and sound pushing every single tiny particle around—and I processed it all, converting it into perceptible data.

The thing about human eyesight is that it doesn’t give you even a 180-degree view of what’s in front of you. Now, all of a sudden, I could “see” a full 360 degrees around myself. The shadows of the rocks around me, the views hundreds of meters away—the moment I turned my attention to it, I could figure out what it was. If I were still human, all this perception data probably would’ve fried my brain circuits. But now I was a slime. My cells could provide muscle just as easily as brain power.

So somehow or other, I withstood the torrent of information. Then—

Synchronizing extra skill Magic Sense with unique skill Great Sage… Successful. All information will now be managed by Great Sage.

Suddenly, my vision opened up. The brain-searing sensation from before was gone, and then I could see—so clearly that it was a wonder I wasn’t able to do it before. Something told me that having the Sage at my side was almost cheating. It wouldn’t be going too far to put it that way. If someone else had it, I’d probably bitch that it was against the rules. Since I had it, though… No problem.

Oh, I think I’ve got it. Thank you very much! I said, turning my attention to the creature in front of me.

Holy crap. He really was a dragon. He was covered in scales that shone a dark shade of black, tougher looking than steel itself but supple and flexible. A big, evil-looking…

Gahh! You’re a dragon!!

He looked positively demonic, towering far higher than I anticipated. My internal scream welled up, pouring out of me, and I don’t think I could really be blamed for it.

What a surprise. I feel bad for ever thinking this guy was pet sized. This was…for real. Absolutely no doubt.

The body, startlingly similar to a Western-style dragon’s, shone like obsidian. There were six fingers on each “hand,” equipped with claws that looked ready to tear through whatever they found. The two pairs of wings on his back—one larger than the other—came to a point at their respective ends, like swords honed to perfection and ready to dice.



Upon closer observation, the ominous scales covering his entire body actually radiated a dark purplish light—a mixture, perhaps, of their natural color and the unearthly force that made its way through the surface. There was something strangely beautiful about his vast shape, the picture of majestic dignity. I began regretting being so rude back when I couldn’t take it all in, but that was all water under the bridge.

Turned out, by the way, that I was indeed oval shaped. Like a little bun. Kind of a…light turquoise, maybe? Lighter than the daylight sky, but not by a lot. A rather elegant color, I thought. Shame about the whole being-a-slime thing.

You do remember your promise, yes? And considering your previous complaints, you learned rather quickly, no?

Oh, of course! I was just joking a little, is all. I can see just fine, and plus I can hear now, too. I really appreciate this!

Hmph. You could have taken your time…

So he was fine after all. A little scary looking, but he was awfully kind to me, for no good reason. He really was lonely, I imagined. It was unfortunate that he looked the way he did. Kind of like that little story about the poor red demon who wanted to befriend the humans.

So what do you intend to do next?

Well, for starters, I figure I might as well look for some otherworlders from my home country. Not that I care too much if I don’t, but…you know.

Finding some would be better, but it’s not as if we’re guaranteed to become fast friends. Plus, with my brand-new eyesight, scoping out the world could do wonders for me. Harvesting the light and sound around me had just expanded my world a thousandfold. Now, finally, I could say good-bye to my days of literally chewing the cud in my tiny cave or whatever.

That dragon, though.

The more I stared at him, the more sinister and terrifying he seemed. And yet he didn’t move a single inch. He mentioned a three-hundred-year-old seal, right?

By the way, Veldora, you said something about being…sealed away?

Mm? Ah. Yes, I perhaps underestimated my opponent slightly. I eventually began fighting with, shall we say, more urgency, but…well, it was rather too late by then!

The dragon sounded almost proud of his losing performance. Magic was one thing, but I doubted there was a sword or lance in this or any other world that could scratch him. It wasn’t as if I knew that much of this world yet—maybe it was crawling with horrifying monsters even more powerful than him, or something?

Was your opponent that tough?

She was…quite strong. She was what the humans call a “hero,” one blessed with so-called divine protection.

A hero? My days in front of a game console had made me well familiar with that term. Simply doing hero stuff didn’t make you dragon-slaying material, though. A lot of recent games had turned their so-called “heroes” into foils or parodies of themselves, besides. Maybe things were still a bit more traditional around here.

Now that I recall, Veldora continued, the hero also said she was “summoned.” Perhaps she hails from the same area as you.

Oh? I dunno… Where I come from, nobody’s that strong, you know?

Perhaps, but many otherworlders come here bearing special powers. Powers that are chiseled into their souls in the midst of their journey. The summoned will always bear one such skill—a unique skill, one exclusive to them and them alone. Unlike the otherworlders who come here by sheer accident, these people bear a soul strong enough to withstand the stress of the summoning process. The fact that said summoning process so rarely succeeds in this world otherwise proves as much.

When you say “summoning process,” do you mean…magic, or whatever?

Precisely. A process requiring at least thirty magicians conducting a ceremony that takes place over three days. It is rarely successful, but it is seen as a powerful weapon to have in one’s arsenal, should the need arise.

A weapon?

Mm. Those summoned in such a manner are bound by a magical curse upon their soul, unable to resist the orders of their masters.

Whoa, really? No human rights or anything?

Human rights? What rights would one possibly expect in this, of all worlds? Do not entertain such fantasies in this realm, little one. The only law that reigns here is survival of the fittest. Might, as they say, makes right.

Well, huh. If you got summoned to this world, no point hoping that your old values applied over here, I guessed. Bit hard to accept that.

So are you saying that otherworlders pretty much get treated like slaves here?

No. It depends. There is no Domination Stamp applied to them. If society accepts them, they are free to live their lives as they please. They can become adventurers or the like. Many otherworlder adventurers have sought my head… They learned the error of their ways soon enough! Hyaaa-ha-ha-ha-ha!!

So you’re only forced into servitude if you were summoned here, huh…?

Not “servitude,” exactly, but I suppose so, yes. I like to believe I know a great deal about the humans, but “a great deal” is not everything.

No… You’re a dragon, besides.

In way, he knew almost too much as a dragon. At least conversing together put me on his good side—enough that he answered all my questions. So we kept talking—Veldora and I, dragon and slime, about all sorts of things.

How had the fight gone with this hero?

How strong was she?

Her skin was pale in color, the dragon told me; her lips were bright red and small. Her long hair was a dark shade of silver, kept back in a single ponytail. She was slim, not that tall, rather small for a human.

Her face was apparently covered by a mask, but there was no doubting her beauty. I asked him whether this beauty was enough to distract him, whether he was too enrapt to defend himself properly. Enough of your nonsense! he bellowed back at me.

Apparently she carried a long, curved sword. A “katana,” it was called. She didn’t bother with a shield. Taking advantage of two unique skills—Absolute Severance and Unlimited Imprisonment—and a wealth of other magic, she, as Veldora put it, “overwhelmed” him. There was more than a trace of nostalgic contentment in his voice, or so it seemed to me.

Something I picked up on as we spoke was that this dragon… I think he really liked humans. He kept calling them “wimps” and “garbage” and such, but from the way he put it, he never deliberately killed anyone who attacked him. Not unless they went out of their way to rile him. One time, three centuries ago—just one time, he emphasized—a certain chain of events made him reduce an entire city to embers. That was what made the people send a hero his way, and now—thanks to that hero’s Unlimited Imprisonment—he was in his current predicament.

I had trouble enough figuring out my own feelings about a lot of things. Other people’s, I could only guess at. But I was starting to get the impression that, well, maybe this wasn’t such a bad dragon at all. I mean, I liked him. And he wasn’t anywhere near as scary as before.

All right! Well, um… What do you think? Friends, then?

It was kind of…no, really embarrassing to put it like that. I’d have been blushing right then, if I could.

Wh-what? A mere slime, daring to seek the friendship of the mighty beast feared worldwide as Veldora the Storm Dragon?!

Oh, um, you don’t have to if you don’t want, but…

You fool! You foolish fool!! Who said anything about not wishing it?!

Oh, no? Okay, so, um…now what?

—Mmm, indeed… If you insist…I suppose I could consider it…

I could feel him sneaking furtive glances at me. It would have been one thing if it had been a cute girl sitting next to me at the movie theater, but it was quite another when it was a death-dealing mythical beast. Not fun. Pretty funny, though.

Yep. I insist. It’s settled! And if you don’t like it, then watch out, ’cause I’ll never come back!

No!—Ah, so be it. I will become your…friend. I do hope you appreciate the gesture!

Heh. I wondered whether I could manipulate the other three dragons he mentioned like this. I was made to exploit people, and he was made to be exploited. A perfect match.

Well, to future times, then!

Indeed! To future times! …Ah, yes, allow me to give you a name. In exchange, you will give one to us both.

Huh? Why? Where’d that come from?

It shall chisel into our souls the fact that we are of the same rank. Something similar to the family names the humans use—except my name, for you, will also provide a kind of divine blessing. You are still nameless now, but through this, you will become a full-fledged named monster.

Mmmm.

So he wanted me to come up with a common name for us to share? And in exchange, I’d get my own name and all the benefits of named-monster status? Better think up something good. I’m terrible at this stuff…

Well, you said you were a storm dragon, so… I dunno, “Tempest” or something?

Ugh. Kind of on the nose, I know, but it sounded cool to me, so—

Perfect! So be it! A wonderful timbre to that title, yes.

He liked it?!

From this day forward, they will call me Veldora Tempest! And you… You will be called Rimuru. Proclaim to the world that your name is Rimuru Tempest!

Thus the name was carved into my soul. Not that it did too much to me. Or my abilities. But somewhere, deep inside my soul, something did change a bit. I suppose the same could be said of Veldora. And that’s how we became friends.

Well, it was time to get going, I supposed. But before that:

Hey, so I had something I wanted to ask before I left, but…can’t you do anything about that seal on you?

Not with my powers, no. Someone with a unique skill on the same level as the hero’s would be necessary for there to be even a chance.

You don’t have any, Veldora?

I do, but now that I am sealed off, I can access none of them. Telepathy is about all I can manage at the moment.

The hero’s Unlimited Imprisonment could hold its target captive in an infinite number of imaginary spaces for all of time. It wasn’t some weak barrier that would allow casual interference with the real world. Looking back, it should have struck me as strange that Telepathy was possible, even. It wasn’t the sort of thing that would break down over time—but given that he could have any contact with the real world, and even exchange messages, perhaps it said more about Veldora. Neither of us noticed this at the time, though.

Well, here, lemme try something…

I rolled over to Veldora and tapped my body against him.

Invoking unique skill Predator to consume unique skill Unlimited Imprisonment… Failed.

I figured as much, but no, I certainly wasn’t hero caliber. With a dazzling light, my unique skill tried to do its work but weakly bounced off without any further comment. I thought it might have made a small rip, but that was all. The barrier would repair itself shortly, no doubt. I was hoping that unique skill on unique skill would result in something, but it didn’t.

Was there anything I could do, though? Something…

Received. Partial Analysis of unique skill Unlimited Imprisonment complete. Reporting a potential escape route.

Any escape involving a physical body is not possible. The chance of destroying the prison by physically damaging it is zero. Cannot analyze an escape route involving the annulment of imaginary space. One would need to be caught within the same Unlimited Imprisonment situation in order to analyze it from the inside. This is currently impossible.

The chance of escaping in spiritual form is one percent.

If a spiritual receptacle is prepared for the target on the outside to aid in the transition, the success rate is three percent. This process is equivalent to transmigration. If the target is poorly compatible with the receptacle, he will lose all memories and abilities.

This concludes the report on potential escape routes.

—Hmm. Kind of low numbers, it sounds like. Unlimited Imprisonment looked like nothing more than a transparent membrane from my perspective…but physical damage did nothing against it? Maybe it had some kind of insurmountable defense attached to it, for all I knew.

Hey, did you lay any damage on this hero at all? Or vice versa?

Ah, I am glad you asked! Most of my attacks were evaded, but I did land several direct hits…which, I regret, had no effect on her. Death-Calling Wind, Dark Lightning, even Storm of Destruction had no effect, despite being completely unavoidable. A total loss… All I could do was laugh!

Veldora then accentuated the point with a loud, hearty guffaw.

It sounded as though you could also use this Unlimited Imprisonment skill to cover your own body, making a shield to protect from external attack. Pretty handy thing to have around. This hero was starting to sound downright omnipotent. Between that and Absolute Severance, she was all but invincible, wasn’t she? I really wouldn’t want to run into her…but then, I wouldn’t have to. I would have liked to assume she had died in the ensuing three hundred years, at least. Either way, she was one tough character.

So if I was going to get him out of here, it would be through transferring his consciousness into a new body, huh?

I guess I need some kind of receptacle to get you out of here. Even if it’s in spirit form only, it sounds like it oughta be possible…

No point telling him what kind of odds he had to go on. I’d just be hurting Veldora further if I dampened his spirits.

Mm? There is a way out of here?! Indeed… I feel my magical force will exhaust itself by no later than a hundred years from now. My magic continues to flow out of me, even now.

Yeah? So that’s why there’s such a concentration of it around here…

Indeed. Even high-class monsters would not dare approach. You saw how there were no weeds on the ground? The sort of plants that can thrive in this area are very rare indeed!

Right. I recalled all the hipokute herbs I’d churned through over my short life. It was that valuable, huh?

Yeah, so…you wanna try escaping, maybe? If I had the right receptacle, I think that’d help our chances a fair amount… Do you know what I’d need, though?

…Indeed, even if I escaped in spiritual form only, it would be quite difficult to regather magic and form my core once more. Your creating a small tear in the prison helped my chances immensely, no doubt. As for that receptacle—the new core, if you will—if you can bring one to me, all I’d have to do is traverse myself over to it. Transmigration, I suppose…

Yow! And here I thought he was a little slow. He knew exactly what I was getting at, didn’t he? The exact same conclusion the Sage had made.

Pretty much, yeah. If it’s something I can get on this side, I could look for it for you.

Hmm… To tell the truth, I do not need any core at all… You can keep a secret, I trust? As I said, I am both unique and the most perfect of my kind. A fully unique creation, one that takes purely spiritual form. I have no particular attachment to this body. It is merely the faith of those who live around me that forms the shape you see.

There he went again. Spouting off complete nonsense.

As far as I could piece together in the ensuing conversation, the basic idea went like this:

Using his consciousness alone, he could gather magicules toward him to form a physical body. Said body was currently being held in this prison, but that prison also prevented his will from collecting the magic he needed. Could he escape in consciousness form alone? No, because he needed some kind of receptacle.

If he simply burst out in spirit form, his essence would scatter to the winds like the magic itself, erasing his very existence. This would result in the birth of a new storm dragon, somehow, somewhere—I didn’t care about the details by this point. But to sum up, maybe he could escape, but if he did, he’d wind up being something else. It wouldn’t matter to him.

So much for that. But what if I used Predator to consume Veldora himself? I could either analyze him inside my stomach, or isolate him and annul the effect of Unlimited Imprisonment, and he’d be out. Would that work?

Received: It is possible to store the target Veldora in your stomach via the unique skill Predator.

Really…? In that case, if I could convince him of it, we could get going. If I couldn’t, he’d have another century of isolation before he was reduced to nonexistence. So I spent a few moments explaining the Predator skill to Veldora, and what I wanted to do with it. It’d be impossible from the get-go without the Sage’s help, but…

Mwah-hah-hah-hah-hah! Fascinating! Please, go ahead. I leave myself at your mercy!

You’re that ready to believe me?

But of course! It’d be far more fun to break through this prison with you than sit around and await your return! With the two of us together, this Unlimited Imprisonment could fall quicker than we thought!

Now I got it. He was one, but now we were two. I liked his outlook.

So the plan was I’d use Great Sage and Predator to analyze this beast, and Veldora would try to destroy it from the inside. No worries about Veldora dissipating away in my stomach. I was starting to think this could actually work.

All right. So I’m gonna consume you, all right? Hurry up and get outta there.

Heh-heh-heh! Right away! You shall make me wait no longer! Let us finally join together!

Right! I summoned up my stores of resolve, touching him for a moment—then activated my Predation skill. In a moment, Veldora’s massive form disappeared from sight.

It happened almost too fast. We were talking just a moment ago. Seeing him gone suddenly made me feel very small and very solitary. Using the skill on my first target created too much resistance to work at all, but with the help of a fully cooperative Veldora in all his hugeness, it couldn’t have gone more smoothly. He and Unlimited Imprisonment itself were sucked in at once.

Kind of a surprise it all fit in me, though. Checking my stomach usage… Geez, 25 percent? How big was that thing, anyway?

Then:

Conduct Analysis of unique skill Unlimited Imprisonment?

Yes

No

This better work, I prayed as I thought Yes to myself.

A cataclysm shook the world on that day.

It was the only way to describe the reaction when the disappearance of the storm dragon Veldora was confirmed. It wasn’t every day that a Special S-ranked monster simply vanished without a trace.

Monsters, as well as adventurers, were ranked on a system of six grades, from A to F. Pluses and minuses could be attached to these grades for extra precision. This system was first put into place by a man named Yuuki Kagurazaka, a rumored otherworlder and one of the few to assume the topmost rank of “grand master” in the Free Guild. It was quickly adopted, thanks to being much easier to understand than the previous, somewhat arbitrary four-tier system of “novice” ? “beginner” ? “intermediate” ? “advanced.”

The Special S rank combined the S rank, which comprised demon lord–class foes that deserved more than simply an A, with the “Special” tag reserved for those above even that class—monsters capable of single-handedly engineering calamities or natural disasters. A scale-breaking rank, existing wholly outside the six traditional ones. Normally, an A-ranked monster alone would be dreadful enough to threaten the existence of a nation—someone like Veldora was dangerous enough to plunge it into despair.

Three hundred years of penance had done nothing to affect the dragon’s rank as a natural disaster–level threat. Just because he had disappeared didn’t mean he couldn’t be reborn somewhere, posing a new menace before long.

But twenty days after the initial report of his disappearance, the Western Holy Church issued a report that, as far as its investigations could tell, Veldora the Storm Dragon both no longer existed and showed no sign of existing anytime soon.

Word spread first in the area around the Forest of Jura, a broad plain dotted with a large number of minor countries. Once Veldora’s fate had been broadly reported, each one of them sprang to their feet, the proverbial hornet’s nest stimulated to action. Every king and every minister of every nation held day after day of emergency meetings, gathering information and debating what to do next.

It was a trying time for the Baron of Veryard, minister of the small kingdom of Blumund, but not half as trying as it was for the man Veryard had called into his private chamber that day. This was Fuze, a man just as renowned for his sharp, unrelenting eyes as he was for his small stature. He was the guild master for this kingdom, a position affording him a hefty amount of authority even in such a tiny nation.

“I believe you know why I summoned you here,” the baron began the moment Fuze walked through the archway. “You have heard about the storm dragon by now, have you not?”

Fuze nodded. “Of course, my baron,” he said in his low, hoarse voice.

“Hmph,” Veryard spat out in response. “I suppose I should expect nothing less of you, my good guild master. Now, may I ask about how the guild intends to respond?”

“We have no particular plans at this time, sir.”

“…I’m sorry, did I hear you correctly? You have no intention to take action?”

“Yes, sir,” Fuze replied with a voice devoid of emotion, silently asking the baron what he was so perturbed about. “I do not feel any action is necessary.”

The baron, not a great fan of this response, chose to keep those feelings hidden. “Rather a strange thing to say, is it not? Not necessary? The disappearance of Veldora the Storm Dragon may portend further monster activity in the space of days, even hours! And you are taking no measure at all against it?”

“It would strike me as rather strange to do so, sir, for taking such measures is the job of the state. I am responsible for the Free Guild, not for providing volunteer work when bidden.”

This was the truth, as far as Fuze was concerned. The Free Guild was an independent, nongovernmental agency. Its members were afforded no special guarantees of security or comfort—unlike the assorted workers and craftsmen on the government ledger—but the basic rights that all citizens were entitled to. Their only official debt to the kingdom came in the form of taxes.

That was the system in Blumund, as it was in nearly all the nations that surrounded it. To put it another way, the Free Guild was a group that operated outside the framework of any nation—and one far more unified than a single government as well. It was a fact that some of their operations occurred without the knowledge or consent of these nations, whether the guild intended it to be seen that way or not.

“Is it not the responsibility of the state,” the guild master meekly continued, “to protect the assets of its people? In the same way, it is the guild’s responsibility to protect the lives of its members. We both have a lot on our plates, I suppose.”

Fuze wasn’t sure whether he had imagined the blue vein that had just popped up on Veryard’s forehead or not.

He hadn’t. The baron knew his position was being probed.

“Enough pretense, Guild Master! How many mercenaries can you provide us? How many adventurers with combat experience? What is the size of the defense force you can provide in service? I need numbers!”

The guild master gave a roll of his eyes and sighed. “I do hope we are on the same page when I say this, sir, but I will remind you, we are not an army of volunteers. If we are talking about a mobilization based on the terms of our agreement, I can provide you the equivalent of one-tenth of our members. If you wish access to anything beyond that, well, that would all depend on our compensation.”

The population of Blumund was almost exactly one million. The membership log of the local Free Guild totaled around seven thousand, family members not included. Thus, if the kingdom decided to invoke its agreement with the guild and muster 10 percent of its members—seven hundred in all—these fighters would officially join the command of the national army.

Such an order, of course, would apply only to guild members who belonged to Blumund and no other nation. All Free Guild members fell under the same banner, but their home nations were also clearly stated in the logs for this reason. What’s more, while a nation had the right to define its own mobilization period under this agreement, it was also obliged to give the guild a one-fifth discount on taxes collected during the entire period. This allowed governments to rapidly summon a powerful force, and the guild to make sure its men would not be obligated to the state for too much of their time. For a group like the guild, which was required to pay salaries to all deployed members in advance, it was the obvious approach to take.

Besides, even if a government asked for every man the local Free Guild had, there would be no way to handle them. After all, only about half of any guild’s membership had any fighting skill.

The Blumund nobles were fully aware of this. Normally, they wouldn’t have their top minister attempt to bully the guild master into better terms…but the times demanded otherwise. The monsters were stirring, for one—but even beyond that, they had more pressing motivations.

“Very well. Enough of this. Are you trying to wring the truth out of me, Fuze?”

Fuze’s eyebrows raised a little at the mention of his name. Veryard rarely, if ever, called him by it. He turned his eyes toward the baron for the first time.

“The area near Veldora’s prison was meant to be absolutely impenetrable,” he said. “Now that route may potentially be open to direct navigation—and that means we must consider the possibility of the Eastern Empire taking action.”

“Ah, certainly so!” the baron replied. “Whether they were letting Veldora be or were simply afraid of the seal being broken, we have been detecting sudden new movements in the Empire after a long period of silence. Do you understand what that means? If they can navigate that forest, this kingdom will be swallowed up instantly. And we can forget about the Western Holy Church providing us any meaningful support! The countries around the Forest of Jura have no meaningful alliance with each other. We will all become Empire vassals in the blink of an eye!”

“No support from the Church…? I fear not, no. They never were terribly interested in wars between mere mortals in the first place. Annihilating the monsters is what their doctrine calls for.”

“Quite so. If we could have them deploy even one of their paladins, the Empire wouldn’t be so quick to move… Not needing to prepare for monster attacks would buy us some time, at least.”

“I doubt anything could stir the Church to action,” Fuze said. “The destruction of a nation or two does nothing to affect their own finances. They cannot help everyone, nor even their own flock.” He took a moment to gauge the baron’s face. Veryard looked exhausted, as if he had aged rapidly in just the past few days. It was understandable.

The two of them were childhood friends. And even though Veryard was merely a baron, if the public knew of Fuze’s close contact with a member of the nobility, it would create assorted difficulties for the both of them. They both had to pretend to use each other for their own personal gain, which was why they usually portrayed their relationship as surly and resentful.

It would take more than the power of a small kingdom to overcome this thorny obstacle they now faced. But perhaps, Fuze thought, his friend was being overly anxious. The Empire was on the move, it was true, but that didn’t mean they should expect an attack before sunset.

“But how do we know the Empire will take action against us?” he offered. “I will gladly conduct my own personal inquiries into the matter. I’d advise you not to expect much, but I can at least gauge the situation in the Forest of Jura and around the Empire.”

“…I would appreciate that.”

Yes. There was no guarantee the Empire would act against them. If it was going to, it would undoubtedly be with a large force. It was never a nation to waste its time with small skirmishes. No, it would casually send over a force of a million or so and trample over every nation in the area, one by one. Assembling such an army would take time, at least three years or so. Which was not a generous amount, but it created some wiggle room to work with.

“I had best begin gathering information, then,” Fuze said to close the conversation. “There is little time. I am off!”

“Thank you…”

The two of them nodded and went their separate ways. There was much to do.

Thirty days had passed since I swallowed Veldora. What had I been up to? Well, think about it. If you were being attacked by a monster, what would you do?

I mean, I was a slime now. It would be hard for me to zip away from a slavering attacker, much less defend myself. So I’d been spending my time thinking about how to fight back.

Along the way, I’d also been consuming any particularly odd-looking herbs or glowing rocks I stumbled across. There was a fair amount. I was still in the region Veldora described as teeming with local magic, and nearly everything I found there was hipokute herbs. Which was about what I figured. More healing potions for me, I suppose.

I also found that most of the glowing stones and such around here were what was called “magic ore,” which could supposedly be refined into a metal harder than iron or steel and highly compatible with magic. I was kinda hoping for something a little less common, but I didn’t even know whether orichalcum or crimson ore existed here, even if they were famous back on Earth. I shouldn’t be too greedy.

So as I was chowing down on all these yummy herbs and rock, an idea came to mind!

If I could spit out water fast enough to give me powers of flight, maybe I could slice right through foes, too, like a high-pressure water jet cutter?

No, no, I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking I was about to screw it up again, aren’t you? You really shouldn’t look down on people like that. I was good in a pinch, you know. They always wrote that in my report cards at school and stuff—“excellent work when he applies himself.”

So yeah, I think it’d work.

Back I went to the underground lake from before. Just as I had imagined, the pool was pretty big. The air felt supremely tranquil to me. There were no creatures around—not even in the water, I assumed, what with all the magic soaked up inside it—which made it all the quieter. Pure, unadulterated nature! Truly a sight to see.

But back to business. I moved right into the “action” phase last time without testing a single thing, which was fairly ill-advised. That, and I ejected too much water at once, propelling myself far quicker than intended. No game plan whatsoever. This time, I’d keep it at water-pistol level, expelling just a bit at a time. Just taking a mouthful of water and—thpbbt—spitting it out.

Here I go.

Hmm. Not much water coming out. Too small of an exit hole? I expanded it a bit. Water shot out with a little more energy this time, dousing a nearby boulder I was targeting. A promising sign.

After a few more minutes spent adjusting my water levels, I decided to boost the pressure just a tad more before opening wide. Launch. Then again. Then again, gradually upping the output as I kept my water-gun practice going.

It was starting to take form, yes. But, okay, while a shot of water might sting a bit, I didn’t think it’d deliver a particularly decisive attack.

So now what? I thought to myself as I took a dip into the lake to gather my thoughts. Whenever I was tired, that was my cue to hit the bath for a bit. I wasn’t just splashing around for kicks, all right? Besides, it also gave me a chance to use Magic Sense and observe myself floating and sinking in the water. I reminded myself of a jellyfish, kind of.

Maybe I could vibrate my body’s surface to create currents or something? I gave it a shot, running magical force across my “skin” to control the particles around me. The vibration ran across my entire body, so I tried to point it in a single direction—and that was all it took to get me moving.

Nice! I spent a little while whizzing around the water like that, enjoying the experience. A nice change of pace, to be sure, but I totally wasn’t just messing around, all right? Let’s keep that straight.

Skill “Current Movement” acquired.

I thought it was the Sage for a moment, but it turned out to be the World Language instead. That bit of playing around just earned me a new skill. Oh, but it wasn’t playing around, okay? I was just relaxing a bit.

Thanks to that, though, I could now flit around in or on the water at a pretty decent clip. If need be, I could use Water Pressure Propulsion to speed things up, too. Considering I didn’t need to breathe, fighting in the water might actually give me an advantage, for all I knew. Good for fleeing into, at least.

That and other matters like it were on my mind as I left the lake. Break time was over, and it had certainly borne fruit for me. As I was relaxing, I had come up with a few new concepts.

If I was going to keep pursuing the water-gun approach, I’d have to apply constant pressure to my jet output for an extended period of time. Instead, I decided to picture the cylinder of a car engine, applying pressure to my inside while releasing a comparatively small amount of water per go. Adjusting the pressure and the diameter of my output hole allowed me to adjust the force of expulsion, just like before.

And thankfully, just as I’d hoped, it worked. A small jet, ejected sharply out of my body, slapped itself against the boulder—and it actually broke the rock slightly where it hit.

Success…I think. Better keep practicing before I forget the knack. Adjust output diameter, adjust pressure…and try putting a bit of spin on the water as you eject it, too. There was a lot to think about as I kept rehearsing it.

But that was it! That was the mental picture I had to keep in mind. Slicing through with water. I had to make the jets as thin and flat as possible, applying just the right spin to them.

So I gave it a whirl. And it worked! The cylindrical shot of water fought through the air resistance fast enough to leave afterimages, just like a blade…then slashed its way right through the rock. With enough force to astound even me.

It was the pinnacle of my efforts, the best results of my week of practice.

Skill “Water Blade” acquired.

Skills “Water Pressure Propulsion,” “Current Movement,” and “Water Blade” acquired. Combining and upgrading to extra skill “Control Water.”

Whoa! It really did work. Extra skills were supposed to offer a completely different level of force than regular ones. Now I had a way of defending myself. It was just about time to head off.

Well. Finally.

One hundred and twenty days had passed since I got reincarnated at the banks of this cavern lake. Was I nervous? Yes. I still couldn’t talk, exactly. I had no vocal cords, and I’d been poking around my body for something I could use as a substitute, but no dice yet. Staying here until I had more success was one option, but unlike with the water blades, I really had nothing to go on. For now, it’d have to be Telepathy or nothing—and if my would-be conversational partner couldn’t use that, then so be it. Not the greatest of situations, but there you go.

Either way, I couldn’t goof around in here forever. I wanted to see the outside world, and if I could, I’d love to run into some fellow Japanese otherworlder castaways. Learning some magic could be fun, too!

It was time to get started. No time like the present, and all that.

Veldora wasn’t giving me any particular responses or signs inside me. It almost felt as though I’d lost him, but I knew that wasn’t the case. We had a promise, besides. Next time we meet, I better have some funny stories I can share with him.

With an internal sigh, I traveled down the lone path upward from the broad underground cavern I had grown used to, my mind on the wide world to come. Who knew what would be awaiting me? I hardly knew what to expect, but I knew I wanted it.

