

CHAPTER 6

THE DEVOURER OF ALL

It was a sight to behold.

I kept up my vigil on the battlefield from above, taking in the reality unfolding on the ground. Flashes of light ran from corner to corner, blowing away dozens of orcs at once. A loud roar rumbled in the sky as a black dome-shaped something appeared, then disappeared after a few seconds and left nothing but a bunch of glass fused into the earth.

All the orcs there must have been burned into nothing. I could tell what had happened easily enough, but I felt like my heart was still having trouble accepting it. Before it could, tornadoes swirled across the field, sending gale-force winds in all directions and burning the orcs alive with bolts of lightning. It looked like one of the black-armored orcs had either been incinerated or torn apart.

My honest appraisal of all this: What the heck?

With every swipe of her sword, Shion was cutting down great quantities of orcs. Her blade was glowing a dim shade of purple, infused with her aura. A flash of the same color shot through the air with every slash, cutting orcish soldiers in half with the shock waves. The sword was no kinder to those it physically struck—some literally exploded. A single slash had a range of twenty feet or so, slicing through everyone unlucky enough to be in its path.

She smiled a graceful, fetching smile as she danced her way through the hordes. The attacks just kept coming, uninterrupted, and not a single orc could lay a claw on her.

Her strength was simply overwhelming.

But there were a couple other guys in battle that made Shion look like a rank amateur. Those were Benimaru and Ranga.

Let’s tackle Benimaru first. What was up with that freaky black dome thing? I had a vague idea when I first saw it, I’ll admit. A combination of my Control Flame, Dark Flame, and Ranged Barrier, I guessed. He used a barrier to freeze the space, Control Flame to accelerate the particle motion inside, and then Dark Flame to convert the excited particles into searing flame. It’d instantly cook everything in the enclosed space, like Ifrit’s Flare Circle except with an even larger range. It disappeared in the space of two seconds, but with temperatures this high, that was enough.

It was a scarily efficient killing device, and the neat thing was how, unlike a nuclear bomb, it didn’t affect the outside area one bit. Not a single shock wave or burst of energy leaked out from the barrier. He must have ranged it carefully to control the temperature inside, and I could only imagine how hot it must’ve been. No way anyone could’ve survived.

The only real problem, I supposed, was the way he took this incredibly dangerous skill—he developed it himself, I later heard, naming it Hellflare—and tossed it around with hardly a second thought, apparently.

Now for the other guy—er, wolf. Ranga.

Transforming into a tempest starwolf out of nowhere was kind of freaky , I thought, but it was the skill he immediately unleashed afterward that really threw me.

I suppose that was how you were supposed to use Dark Lightning, without placing any limits on it. And he even controlled the wind to enhance its effects. Dang. What was that?

Understood. I believe the individual Ranga combined Dark Lightning with the extra skill Control Wind, taking advantage of the differences in temperature and atmospheric pressure to create bursts of up-and-down-flowing currents, thus creating whirlwinds.

Huh. Neat. I don’t get it.

So he generated tornadoes to attack a wider range than he could with just lightning? Well, it sure worked. It knocked out an entire section of the orc horde.

It consumed a ton of his magic, though, so I doubted a second strike was coming any time soon. Which, I mean, if he could rapid-fire stuff like that, I think we’d need to redefine everything about how war even worked on this planet.

Gauging all of this made me realize something. The brakes I had subconsciously been applying to myself all this time— they had nothing like that. No concept that some skills were a little too dangerous to unleash and just lobbed them willy-nilly at enemies. That was a given in the survival-of-the-fittest world they were born in, I imagined, and really, maybe I was the one being weird about it. It’d suck if I held back and my friends paid dearly for it.

Over in my old world, there was this tacit agreement that, yes, we’ve got all these devastating weapons and stuff, but we can’t actually use them. They were more for deterrence. But was that really the case? What’s the point of spending so much money on weapons you could never use? Taking all that time to develop them? They’re meant for launching when the times call for it, no? And if you’re not supposed to use them on innocent citizens, did that suddenly make it okay to use them on the battlefield? I think if you got your brains blown out in a war, you probably wouldn’t care much about the exact murder weapon that did the deed, wherever you wound up.

Maybe that was the whole point. You needed to show people that you were strong if your weapons were ever going to serve as a deterrent. Maybe there was nothing wrong with that at all, actually. Look at Ranga, for one—he’s just sitting there, observing, and nobody’s daring to go near him. They’re as deterred as they can get.

I mused absentmindedly to myself for a while.

The battle had been raging for around two hours.

Benimaru had popped off four of those dark-dome attacks. Not even he could deploy them in rapid succession, but I guess they didn’t sap that much of his energy. Ranga’s attack, meanwhile, was proving more of a one-and-done thing. I guess he put his all into it, which explained his current comparative silence. It certainly helped cow his opponents into submission anyway.

As I saw a bunch of orcs running around in a panic, trying not to get caught in Shion’s attack range, I decided to analyze the situation a bit. I felt oddly calm now. Benimaru decided where to attack first, but I had ultimate authority over where to go last. I wanted to strike the enemy hard on a specific spot, attracting our foes to Shion and hitting them where it hurt.

Hakuro was busy handling the commander-class enemies for me, and I would hardly call that a battle. He approached them soundlessly and diced them up in an instant. The Ravenous unique skill let the armies boost their leader’s strength by consuming the dead, so making the bodies themselves vanish was apparently a priority for him, which I appreciated. Part of his Modelwill Art, maybe? I could see him release an aura from his palm, burning the corpses—or melting them, really.

We proceeded along those lines for a while, with me spotting an enemy commander and sending Hakuro over to erase him. We were overwhelming the orc armies, and zero cost to ourselves. I kept up my watch, trying to stay as efficient as possible.

Even the more eager ogres realized that the tables had turned by now, I was sure. They weren’t attacking as frantically as they were before. They kept their distance from Benimaru and Ranga, fanning out their formations so they weren’t bunched together.

At that point in time, the orcs had suffered about twenty percent casualties. Over forty thousand had lost their lives. And it wasn’t until then that the enemy’s nerve center—the orc lord—finally took action.

The orc lord, a pig-headed monster who redefined ugliness, came to the front. He had two orc generals with him, both clearly a level above the orcs from before. Their dull, yellow eyes were brimming with hatred, and I could see their auras all the way from up here.

Benimaru, Shion, Hakuro, and Ranga were now lined up together to engage them. Even Soei was there, now next to Benimaru. They were clearly ready to rock.

So how strong’s this orc lord, then? I had no idea, really, but it seemed that all the powers he gained were starting to make him lose control of his own sense of self. Maybe that was why he was so late to react to us. I wasn’t so sure I needed to worry much about him.

Either way, though, we couldn’t let him get any stronger. Now that Benimaru and everyone else had arrived, I figured the sooner we took him down, the better. I took my mask out from my pocket and put it on. Time to teach him a lesson , I thought as I descended to the ground.

Just as I was about to touch land…

Tiiiiiing.

…there was a sharp, ear-piercing sound. As it rang in my mind, my Magic Sense noticed something flying toward the area at high speed—aimed right at the middle of the marsh where the two armies were fighting away.

It was a man, dressed rather oddly and with a distressingly strong aura. One of those upper-level magic-borns I’d been hearing about. I landed on the ground, following his trail, Ranga and Benimaru sidling next to me.

The man gave us a sideways glance. “What in blazes is going on here?!” he shouted, wearing his emotions on his sleeve. “Who dares to disrupt the plans of the great Gelmud himself?!”

I think I had an idea of what we were dealing with. This was the bad guy, wasn’t he? I knew it. And the way he revealed who he was without anyone asking indicated he might be a bit of an idiot, too.

He looked minion level, but I didn’t want to read this book by its cover. His clothes were odd, but each component seemed to be magical by nature. I’d best not let my guard down, I thought. If I had to guess, this was the guy setting the orc lord on the general populace. And now that his plans were going awry, he looked seriously pissed.

“L-Lord Gelmud!” Gabil stammered as he ran up to him. “I never would have expected you to come to my aid at a time like this!”

Gelmud just looked at him the way someone would look at a giant pile of garbage. “You worthless wastes of space!” he spat out at the orcs all around him. “If you had just eaten these stupid lizards and other fodder and evolved into a demon lord, then I, the great Gelmud, wouldn’t have to be here right now!!”

Well, that’s kind of mean. Does he understand what he’s saying, really? He means that the lizardmen and goblins were just meant to be food for the orc lord? Not that it matters to me, but…

…Wait, haven’t I heard the name Gelmud before?

Understood. My information indicates the magic-born that gave the goblin called Rigur his name was himself named Gelmud.

Oh right. Gelmud was the guy who named the first Rigur, the older brother of the current one. Did he name Gabil, too, then? The lizardman himself spoke up before I could pursue the question further.

“Eaten these…lizards? Ha…ha-ha-ha! Talk about your gallows humor, eh? You’ll find I am still perfectly hale and hearty, Lord Gelmud. Ever since you granted me your name, I have done my best to exercise the full potential of my abilities…”

Ah, so it was him. But naming a monster just so the orc lord could consume him? That…made an awful lot of sense, actually. Eating a named monster with enhanced skills and strength and all that, would make the orc lord that much more powerful.

But why not name the orc lord himself, then? A lot of this guy’s M.O. still made little sense to me.

“Huh? Oh. You, Gabil?” Gelmud asked while I was pondering this. “I wish you could’ve fed yourself to the orc lord sooner than now… As blundering and worthless as you are, you still bother to haunt this world? Well, so be it. Now that I am here, I might as well help you shuffle off to your grave. Gabil, I hereby command you to become the orc lord’s strength. Your death will be the greatest thing you have ever done for me!”

He was gesturing wildly at the orc lord now. The orc lord didn’t budge. He simply looked at Gelmud with his sunken eyes and opened his mouth.

“Evolve…into demon lord… What is that…?”

“Dahh! Your brain must be the size of a walnut,” Gelmud mustered. “It seems all that prey has avoided your brain entirely and gone straight to your muscles. We are out of time. I am forbidden to meddle in this…but I have no other choice.”

He turned his bloodshot eyes to Gabil now, showing an open palm. Then, without any further warning, he shouted “Die!” and launched a bolt of magic.

“Look out, Sir Gabil!”

“Get, get down!”

A small detail of lizardmen scurried toward the awestruck Gabil to protect him, forming a living shield as they warned him of the danger. That single magic bolt was enough to send five high into the air. But it didn’t kill any of them. Whether the force of the blast was dissipated among all the bodies or the lizardmen were really just that tough, nobody was dead from it. Seriously injured, yes, but very much alive.

“Wh-what are you…?!” Gabil exclaimed. “Lord Gelmud, why did you do such a thing…?!”

So he was using and abusing Gabil all this time, and now that things weren’t going perfectly according to plan, he was gonna kill him? Something told me that I probably wouldn’t get along too well with this Gelmud guy.

Gabil’s face twisted itself in despair, betrayed by the one person in this world he believed in.

“S-Sir Gabil, it’s too dangerous!” one of his injured troopers advised him. “Please, get out of here as quickly as possible.”

He certainly had some nice people under him—or maybe it was more like Gabil was a great boss to them. Judging by the state of things when I arrived, he hadn’t used the goblins as the throwaway pawns I expected him to. Perhaps he was using them as a first-line tactical defense, but I could see he had a good reason for it.

The beloved commander, huh…?

“You cocky inferior races… If you wish to die that badly, I’ll kill the lot of you right now! Perhaps you’ll finally be of service to me once you’re in the orc lord’s stomach!!”

Gelmud began focusing his aura above his head, attempting to launch an even more powerful magical bolt. Or was it magic? Because he took almost no time to cast it. All he did was close his eyes and gather his magic at a particular point in the air. Not that it mattered.

I walked ahead, in front of the lizardmen—and in front of Gabil, who was now digging down to protect his men, even in his current daze. I knew he couldn’t see my face through the mask.

What does Gabil think about me right now? I couldn’t shake the thought.

Why was I standing in front of him? That was an easier question—because I liked him. I wanted to help him.

That was the only reason, and that was all I really needed. I wasn’t afraid to do whatever I wanted in life—in fact, I’d sworn it to myself.

Gabil looked up at me in awe. I doubted he understood what was going on. Things had vaulted beyond what his brain could process. Don’t worry, though. I don’t expect any favor back. This guy here? He’s just pissed me off.

“Sir Rimuru, I…”

I held Benimaru back with an arm and took a step forward. Gelmud paid no attention, still focused on the gigantic magic bolt he was conjuring up.

“Ba-ha-ha-ha! Let me show you what a high-level magic-born can do to you all. Time for you to die! Death March Dance!!”

Gelmud had an expression of crazed joy. He intended to do us all in at once.

The bolt, when he finally launched it, split into countless smaller bolts in the air, all arcing toward us. Each one was about as powerful as the first bolt he produced, and now tons were raining down upon us, one by one, as if forming an orderly line. Gelmud, I’m sure, was expecting us to be helpless, perishing with nowhere else to run to.

Sadly, though, they didn’t work on me. I slowly brought a small hand forward, and that was all it took to absorb all the bolts with my Predator skill. A quick round of Analysis produced instant results. This wasn’t magic, but an Art—one where he could roll his aura energy together, mix it with magicules, and give it destructive power.

The fundamental idea was the same as Hakuro’s Modelwill, I figured. But while the energy Gelmud expended on it outclassed anything Hakuro had, splitting that force into so many smaller bolts made the overall impact equal or less. He wasn’t too well-versed in the move yet—and if that was all the power he could cobble together, I was in no danger at all.

“Hey,” I said, “is that all you got? You want me to ‘die’ just with that? Maybe you could give me a demonstration in how to die first?”

I focused my own magic and tried launching a bolt of my own. But nothing came out from the right hand I thrust at him. I could feel the magic and aura flow within me, but I couldn’t quite control it. Even if I understood how it worked, that didn’t mean I could execute it that easily.

So unlike magic, I couldn’t just analyze this to grab it for myself…? Practice really does make perfect. After that killer line I just gave him, too. This is a little embarrassing.

Thus, to cover up for my mistake, I shot off an Icicle Lance. It wasn’t like I was married to Modelwill or anything. I just wanted to see how well I stacked up against a so-called upper-level magic-born at this point.

And once I get bored of it, I’ll “consume” you, too.

My Icicle Lance accelerated in the air before contacting Gelmud. He had his arms in front of him in an attempt at defending himself, and then instantly froze. He screamed in agony—magic worked well enough on him, which I wasn’t expecting.

Of course, no magic-born of the upper ranks would be finished by that alone. He immediately shattered the ice off his arms and fired an even larger bolt of magic at me. No fancy tricks this time; just a big, blunt hunk of magic, crafted with everything he had.

“Die! How dare you inflict pain upon me… I’ll blast you to smithereens!!”

But he couldn’t. I just ate it up with Predator again. He let out a surprised yelp, shocked that I snuffed out the attack once more.

“No! What— What is that you’re…?!”

He began shaking fearsomely. I sent a Water Blade his way. He tried to dodge, but the speed of it caught him off guard, cutting a deep gash in his side.

“Gaahh!! Y-you… That was not magic…?”

So it wasn’t that he couldn’t guard it—he just didn’t. He apparently thought Water Blade was magic, so he attempted to counter with an anti-magic barrier instead of expending the energy to dodge it. That barrier was probably why the Icicle Lance didn’t do much lasting damage.

Gelmud began chanting a spell, fervently attempting to heal himself. Wow, he’s got that kinda thing, huh? He looked like a freak, but maybe he was more multitalented than I thought. Guess the “magic-born” name wasn’t there for show. Maybe I ought to exercise the ol’ arsenal a little myself.

Benimaru, Ranga, and the others were keeping a safe distance away, staying on the ready but apparently content in letting me handle matters. Shion was probably expecting me to go all-out, I imagined, but she didn’t look disappointed in me. She was hooked, in fact, eyes sparkling with delight as she watched. Hakuro and Soei, meanwhile, were ready to join me at a moment’s notice, just like I figured they would.

The orc lord and his minions didn’t seem like they were going anywhere, either. Now was the time, I supposed. I casually sauntered forward, stopping once I was next to the still-cowering Gelmud.

“Hey, can we get serious now? You were gonna show me what a high-level magic-born can do, weren’t you?”

Then I kicked him. Hakuro could’ve easily dodged it, I was sure, but Gelmud took the full brunt of it. I could feel the sensation of bones breaking against my foot.

Must’ve been a more telling blow than I thought…or was Gelmud that much of a wuss? Oh wait… I have Multilayer Barrier and Body Armor on me, don’t I? That probably had something to do with it.

“Y-y-you…?! I am a magic-born, and you…”

As I pondered over what I had just done, Gelmud began to unleash his full aura in a rage. Yep, he sure was an upper-level guy. But it was still at only about the level of Shion or Soei—lower than Benimaru, in fact. Did that make him an upper-level magic-born? I knew I shouldn’t have worried.

With a sudden dash, I launched myself toward Gelmud’s chest, aiming a fist right at the pit of his stomach. I felt no pain as I propelled it through his magical defenses. They dulled the effect of melee attacks, apparently, but they couldn’t fully dull the effects of my punch.

A look of anguish spread across his face. I paid it no mind, landing a flurry of strikes. He could do nothing to keep up with them. His aura was huge, but in terms of physical strength, he was nothing. Long-range strikes must have been his forte—and most projectile attacks were completely helpless against Predator.

I never thought much about it, but against long-range attacks, I had a pretty insurmountable advantage, I supposed. Let’s try some long-range moves of our own, then. I adjusted the Water Blade I fired a moment ago, creating a ball of liquid. Then I tried infusing it with Poisonous Breath and Paralyzing Breath, seeing if it could all mix together.

I then tossed the resulting ball, about the size of a fist, at Gelmud. It wasn’t as fast as I thought it’d be, given that it wasn’t pressurized like Water Blades. It was slow enough for Gelmud to react to, and he fired back with a magic bolt of his own. That Water Blade from before must’ve taught him to do away with the taunts and such.

But it wasn’t done yet. The ball exploded into a spray of fine mist, spreading all over Gelmud’s body.

“Garhh!!” he shouted in anguish, writhing in the mist. Just as I hoped. Now I knew how to modify the Water Blades themselves. And…wait.

I think I had my finger on something here. When I created that ball just now, that feeling I had…

I pointed my right hand at Gelmud, who was still in pain and desperately attempting to heal himself. Will this work? When I made that ball, I didn’t take any water out from my stomach for it—I just rolled it out from my aura. Maybe if I tried that with magicules instead… There we go. I now had a fist-size piece of spirit above my right hand. So far, so good.

Now, how to fire this at him… Slowly, I pushed it forward, as if executing a breath-type attack. I felt something push lightly against my palm, and then the ball of spirit shot forward as fast as a Water Blade. Guess it worked.

Hakuro’s eyes burst wide open. “He’s learned Modelwill,” I could hear him whisper. “Still unrefined, though.”

So now I had my own magical bolts. We’ll just ignore the second thing he said for now. Once I learned something, things would fall into place pretty quickly. I was sure I could burn more magic to boost its strength, too.

That shot just now missed, sadly. I’ll hit the next one , I thought as I stared Gelmud down.

“What are…you…?! How?! Not even an upper-level magic-born such as I could—”

He was interrupted by the bolt of magic knocking him cleanly off his feet. I was still just practicing, so I didn’t put too much force into it, but it still beat one of my punches, it looked like.

Next I fired several in succession. Smooth sailing. It’d just be a matter of time before I fully mastered it.

Time for more practice , I decided as I targeted several shots on Gelmud. I then simply stood there as they all hit home. Geez, I’m more merciless than I thought. I think I got a little too excited about learning this new attack.

Still, this dude was way too weak. His store of magic was definitely beyond A level, I’d grant him that, but he still felt weaker than the ogre mages. What’s with that?

Understood. The ranking system, as defined by the human race, makes its calculations based on the quantity of the subject’s magicules. However, even if two subjects with the same quantity of magic fought each other, the competitor with skills and Arts that consume this magic more efficiently would have a decided advantage. A subject’s “level” is an arbitrary figure, with no official method of calculation, and is thus not reflected in an individual’s ranking.

Ahhh. So levels didn’t count as far as the Sage was concerned. Not like you can really say what “level” you are in life, and have anything to back that up with. This wasn’t a video game, after all—some things you could only figure out by actually fighting dudes and seeing how you stacked up. Maybe that was why Hakuro, already high level to start with, exhibited such a startling change in physical strength with his evolution.

You could have all the power in the world, and it meant nothing if you couldn’t harness it. Gelmud proved that much. I couldn’t lose.

“Ya know,” I said tauntingly, “you can go around calling yourself a high-level magic-born all you want, but you don’t look like much of anything to me. Or do you have some kind of last resort you’re hiding?”

Yeah, what kinda skills does he have? ’Cause I didn’t feel like I was in any kind of danger, but I wanted to glean as much intel as I could. I wasn’t letting my guard down—my mind was on the orc lord’s potential moves, but he still didn’t seem interested in moving at all.

“All right,” he said. “I will let you join my cause. Soon, I will—”

I punched him.

Does he listen to anything people say?

“Agh! S-stop, stop! Wait a minute! I have the backing of a demon lord behind me! You will not get away with this—”

Oh, now he comes out with that. Man, what a pain in the ass.

“So?” I asked. “And what’re you gonna say when you run back crying to this guy? You don’t think he’d actually let you stay alive after this, do you?”

Gelmud began visibly shivering, face painfully tense.

“Gaahhhh!! Get away from me!” He stammered the words as he crawled backward. “You’re dead! The demon lord will never forgive this!!”

The demon lord, huh? Leon, hopefully—I had a date with him already. I doubted I could take him right now, really, but I was curious how strong he was.

I knew there were multiple demon lords running around, but were they all about the same, power-wise? This guy seemed to know a thing or two about them, and I’d love to pick his brain for a while, but I’d hate to blink once and have him slip through my fingers. I had to think about that as I interrogated him. Hopefully he’d stay just as loose-lipped as when he revealed his role in all this.

A pity I couldn’t just consume him and gain all his memories. That worked for magical knowledge, for some odd reason, but even that was kind of the luck of the draw. I could always extract skills from that, though, which almost seemed like cheating.

Speaking of that, I quickly decided to use my Sticky Steel Thread skill to keep Gelmud in place before he got any funny ideas. He had already been levitating into the air, chanting something—probably attempting to fly off, I assumed. But that was no problem now.

“Damn you!” he shouted, attempting to unravel himself as I approached him silently. “S-stop, get away! Hey! Orc lord! Over here! Help me!!”

Now he was seeking salvation from the very orc lord he called a fool and a dunderhead a moment ago. Talk about a lost cause. I always respected a leader who had the high regard of his staff, but I hated the opposite. Especially when they treated the people under them as disposable. I was merciless against that.

He probably had a lot of juicy skills on him. No need to waste any more time. But having the chance to speak to Gelmud beforehand made the thought of eating him more than a little unpleasant.

The heaps of corpses that now surrounded him made his heart cry out in pain.

—I’m hungry…

—Hungry…

—You? A high-orc kid? Why don’t you just die already, you worthless brat?

—All of us are starving now… O great magic-born, grant us your mercy…

—Don’t touch me! You’ll get your grime all over my clothes… Hmm? Wait. You…

—Is it all right if I eat this?

—Of course. No need to restrain yourself. Eat until you’ve had your fill, so you can grow big and strong.

—Thank you, o great magic-born!! I will never forget this—

—It is fine. From today forward, you may consider me as your father. Ah yes. Let me give you a name. Your “name” shall henceforth be—

Scenes from the past flashed in his mind. Memories of the first time he was picked up by the magic-born who adopted him. And now he was following his adopted father’s orders, hoping to repay the favor any way he could.

The two shared the same mission—to transform the Forest of Jura, this bountiful place, into a second paradise for the orcs. So they could abandon their own starvation-racked, disease-ridden homeland, so barren of anything that even the demon lord no longer paid it any mind.

If he could only gain control of the forest, his father would have his talents recognized by the demon lord. He would become part of the demon lord’s leadership, and once that happened, he promised that he would provide aid to even more of his allies.

But to do that, he needed power. He needed to consume the higher-level races of the forest, gain more strength—and build a new paradise for the orcs, a safe haven to build upon. The forest’s blessings would ensure their comrades never had to think about starving again. The other races might suffer, perhaps, but they would have to accept that “survival of the fittest,” that absolute, incontrovertible law, applied to them, too, in the end.

This war, after all, was a struggle to find the seeds capable of survival.

…It should have all worked out that way.

—If only you would’ve evolved into a demon lord already…

What did he mean? What did his father, Lord Gelmud, want from him?

For the one called the orc lord, all he could do was stare at his adoptive father, with his dull, yellowish eyes.

Gelmud, paralyzed by fear, fired bolt after bolt of magic at me, materializing them out of thin air despite having his hands restrained. A very skillful act, but it didn’t help him. They harmlessly bounced off my Multilayer Barrier—the bolts counted as a melee attack, I guess, so they couldn’t penetrate my defense at all. I knew that from my previous Analysis, so I knew I no longer had to bother Predator-ing them.

The former sneer on his face was replaced with a gasp of despair.

“Dammit!” he shouted. “Help me, orc lord— I mean, Geld!!”

Ah. So he had named the guy after all. I suppose he wanted to conceal his relationship to the orc lord, for reasons I couldn’t surmise. He said he was “forbidden to meddle” before, which I imagined had something to do with it.

That, at long last, stirred the orc lord to action. Did he want to help Gelmud? Well, all right. He was free to do whatever. I promised Treyni that I’d take him out anyway. It looked, externally speaking, that he was little more than Gelmud’s puppet, but I didn’t care. It wasn’t like picking off the guy behind the scenes was gonna neatly end all of this.

I had no reason to hate this orc. But that didn’t mean I could let him live.

Watching him as he closed the distance between us, I gauged the situation. None of this felt threatening in the least. I couldn’t estimate his magic stores since I hadn’t made physical contact with him yet, but I figured it wouldn’t be too far from Benimaru’s. And that was still around half of Ifrit’s. If I gave this a serious effort, it shouldn’t be too tricky. My main concern was what would happen once all these orcish soldiers were leaderless.

“Well, it’s about time you stood up, you good-for-nothing idiot. Ha-ha-ha! I don’t know who you think you are, but you’re about to get a taste of real strength! Get him, Geld! Show him what it means to defy me and—”

With a wet, squishy-sounding thud, Gelmud’s order was cut off mid-sentence. His head rolled along the saturated ground a few feet. The orc lord had done a marvelous, if somewhat forceful, job of chopping it right off his shoulders.

Crunch, splish, splorch.

Ugh, gross… He’s eating the dude.

The orc lord, upon walking up to Gelmud, had not hesitated a moment in using his meat cleaver–like weapon to decapitate the man. Once that was done, he started to slash away, carving the body into small, bite-size pieces that he immediately hurled into his mouth. It was a low-born, pathetic, and all-too-suitable ending for Gelmud.

So this pig-guy wanted him dead, too, huh? Or was this his orcish instincts at work? Either way, it wasn’t exactly great news for me. The dull, yellow eyes now had the glint of youth and intelligence to them. He had regained his sentience, something he had once lost to the power he gained from all the different races he had tasted. I wasn’t anticipating this… Talk about biting the hand that feeds you.

The resulting aura was like nothing I had experienced so far today.

Confirmed. The orc lord’s magical energy has expanded in quantity. He has begun the evolution process to a demon lord seed… Evolution complete. The individual Geld has completed the evolution to an Orc Disaster.

Ooooh… That was the World Language talking, wasn’t it? Neat.

Wait. Stay focused, man. He’s really done it now. There I was, figuring I could whip him anytime I wanted, and now look. Cut me a break, man.

This was completely my fault. I knew I shouldn’t have gotten so cocky. Gelmud was so much weaker than I anticipated, and I figured killing the main guy behind all this would wrap everything up, neat and clean. Boy, was I wrong. Too bad I didn’t kill him when I had the chance.

Okay, new rule from now on. When you can kill a guy, just do it. I’d have to keep that in mind. No point making mistakes if you never learned anything from them, after all.

But getting back to the point. What should I do with this guy? I couldn’t stew in my own juices forever. He’s gonna have to be taken down, one way or the other.

Things were now moving along by themselves, regardless of what I thought. Reality wasn’t willing to wait for me.

“Graaarrrgh!! I am an Orc Disaster, the devourer of all! My name is Geld— Geld, the demon lord!!”

To Geld, I suppose, he was just bringing to fruition what Gelmud wanted for him this whole time. Gelmud wanted him to become a demon lord, and he simply selected the quickest way to evolve into one. Just as Gelmud wanted. No servant could have been more loyal to his master, and I sadly didn’t notice that in time. All I could do there was groan out “What a monster…”

His eyes were now youthful, full of sparkling energy and intelligence. His mere presence was intense, severe, on a scale like nothing Gelmud had ever achieved.

This was a demon lord. A monster whose magic energy had multiplied into something almost overwhelming. He certainly deserved the title. The World Language suggested this was a demon lord seed, too—the real evolution had yet to happen, maybe?

I better kill him right now , I realized, or else he really would become a disaster for the world.



\*   \*   \*

Benimaru and the other ogres were positioned for battle. They could see how much of a threat the demon lord Geld was. Their easygoing smiles were gone, replaced with stern, serious frowns.

“Sir Rimuru!” Benimaru said. “Let us handle this!” Shion, meanwhile, didn’t even bother to speak. With a flash, she whipped out her large sword and swung it home, putting all her strength behind it, enhanced further by the extra skills Steel Strength and Strengthen Body.

Geld attempted to block it with one meat cleaver–equipped hand. Even for him, it wasn’t quite enough. He brought up his right hand now, too, doing his best to resist Shion’s incessant attack.

“You think some dirty pig can be a demon lord?!” Shion shouted as she landed another strike from up high. “Don’t you dare believe that!” Kurobe’s expertly crafted blade now had a visible aura around it, as it landed with a dull thud against the demon lord’s body.

Both took a step back before clashing once more. Longsword slammed against cleaver, raining sparks upon the battlefield. It looked like an even match, but before long, the differences between the two became clear. Every muscle on Geld bulged, his very armor pulsing as if it were part of his body.

It was the demon lord who won out in the end. His muscle outclassed Shion’s, even with Strengthen Body and all of that. The evolution had greatly enhanced his physical body. It made me want to sigh in despair.

Shion was tossed back, and Geld pursued her. Realizing the danger, she attempted to deflect the blow while leaping backward to reduce the impact. The damage upon her was clear nonetheless. She winced in pain—it’d be a while before she was ready to move again.

But Shion wasn’t the only one here. As Geld landed the follow-up attack, a middle-aged samurai stood strong behind him.

It was Hakuro, and with a speed even I was just barely capable of following, he drew his sword from the staff it was hidden in.

The blade glowed with a constant light, energized by the battle force housed inside the wielder. Its brightness indicated exactly how focused Hakuro was on this. No one could block or dodge him now. A streak of metal ran across the demon lord’s body, cutting it cleanly in half and even slicing off the head on the way back up.

That had to be enough , I thought, but I was still being far too optimistic. Geld’s body reconnected itself, thanks to a yellowish aura that regrouped all the parts with tentacle-like tendrils. The completed body then leaned down, grabbed its head off the ground, and reattached it like nothing was amiss.

The horror movie–like scene silenced everyone for a moment. Even Hakuro was obviously surprised.

Now I knew the most fearsome thing about the demon lord Geld was his otherworldly healing skills. For now, this monster wouldn’t have any resistances, but once he gained them, he’d be impossible to kill.

Then:

“Demonwire Bind!”

Soei used his Sticky Steel Thread to apprehend Geld. He had been lurking within Hakuro’s shadow, waiting for the perfect timing to restrain the demon lord’s moves.

“Get him, Benimaru!” he shouted. Benimaru was already on the move, suddenly unleashing a Hellflare strike. Only a small dome opened around Geld—whether he was deliberately keeping it small or was short on energy after deploying four of them, I didn’t know.

Geld, restrained, had no means of escape from the barrier as it became engulfed in high-temperature flames, doing their level best to incinerate the demon lord. The power of the heat was unaffected by the size of the dome, giving us a guaranteed death.

Or so we thought. Several seconds later, the dome was gone—and Geld was just casually standing there. Benimaru grimaced at the sight. Hellflare was a powerful move, yes, but it was designed for efficiency. It was focused on doing its deed within only a couple seconds; it was incapable of keeping the burners on for extended periods of time like Ifrit could.

Generating Ifrit-style temperatures with relatively little energy was an impressive feat, don’t get me wrong. But a target with enough resistance could easily focus on defending itself to survive the blast, I suppose. If Benimaru could make it last longer, the flames would eventually overcome any resistance or regenerative skills. That, or maybe he could focus further to make the fire even hotter, capable of burning anything in the world. But no.

It wasn’t wholly ineffective, though. Geld had no heat resistance; his skin was burned horribly. The resistance his aura offered was all that kept it from being a lethal blow. He had probably gained something along the lines of Self-Regeneration, like what I had in slime form. The burned skin was already sloughing off, with new skin being generated from underneath. And the moment Geld whispered something, he began to heal quicker than ever.

He must have inherited—or seized—Gelmud’s own healing skills. Combined with his own inherent abilities, he could probably heal almost as fast as me with Ultraspeed Regeneration.

The battle continued as I watched and analyzed. Ranga aimed an extra strike at Geld before he could fully heal from Benimaru’s damage. He focused his Dark Lightning on a single point and released it, much as I had before. Nothing fancy; just a killer amount of force. It hit Geld directly, freezing him. He was burned and blackened, and as we watched, he fell to the ground.

This time, I was sure we had won. And why not? Not even I was sure I could withstand that kind of attack. If it were a Replicant of mine, it’d be burned to a crisp.

I guess we all wound up pitching in on this kill. Hope they don’t think any less of me for it. I doubted any of the ogre mages could’ve taken him on solo and had any chance. That attack just emptied Ranga’s energy, too—Dark Lightning consumed a ton of it, with obvious results. He was now curled up on the ground, unable to move. I wish he could’ve kept a bit in reserve, but I couldn’t blame him for not doing so at a time like this. Besides, it was over now, right?

Then I heard something.

“So this…is pain.”

The blackened, charred demon lord was back on his feet.

Guess not, then?

“No way,” I whispered.

This monster was totally beyond all common sense. I wasn’t sure this was reality any longer.

Before my eyes, the demon lord had just ripped off both his arms and eaten them.

An orc general ran up to him.

“My lord, let my body join yours…”

They nodded at each other, and that was that. The orc general was killed, then casually cannibalized.

Man… And with every bite, that charred skin fell away, revealing yet another fresh layer underneath. Then he grew entirely new arms, driven by the muscle and fiber gained from what he consumed. He could use that to cast Self-Regeneration on himself as many times as he wanted, I imagined.

Talk about an incredible healer. I mean, seriously, if we don’t kill this dude in one hit, we’re never getting outta this. Or maybe we’d have to render him into nothing but atoms to finish him. The one thing we knew for sure, though, was that my five strongest underlings could pool their abilities together and that still wasn’t enough.

Then the demon lord let out a guttural battle roar. “Not enough!” he screamed, his yellow aura coursing across his body. “More! More, let me eat more! Consume them all! Chaos Eater!!”

Like sentient tendrils, the yellow aura extended its way toward the nearby piles of bodies. They instantly corroded their flesh, consuming them whole. If anything, it was this yellow aura that was the true driver behind Geld’s power.

It was another application of his unique Ravenous skill. Part of that skill involved Rot—something that could literally rot anything that it made contact with. If the target failed to resist it, it was corroded and killed if it was organic. Fearsome indeed.

Instinctively sensing all this, I ordered my troops to retreat.

“Fall back!”

The moment I did, the ogres stepped back.

“Tell Gobta and the lizardmen not to come near here!”

“What about you, Sir Rimuru?” Benimaru asked.

I opened my mouth to reply. I was cut off.

“You will become my next meal. Die! Death March Dance!!”

The same attack Gelmud tried out earlier. But now it was much more of a punisher. Not only was far more energy packed into it, but each tiny magic bolt had Rot added to it. Get hit by one, and even the ogres would be gravely hurt.

I had to do something.

I was no longer able to keep my body from quivering. This was something that came from instinct. Uh-oh. I just couldn’t stop.

—Is this fear?

No.

This…is joy.

Oh. So I’m overjoyed.

Yes—

From deep within my body, I was quivering in a frenzy of joy, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

A foe that even five of my strongest fighters couldn’t handle. And yet, there wasn’t a trace of fear in my heart. The depression I entered this battle with was a thing of the past.

Now, this demon lord had elevated himself in my mind. He was my enemy. Sorry I thought you were just a pain in the ass earlier. Now I’m serious!

A flurry of magical bolts flung themselves toward me. I used Predator to consume them, and then the tendrils of yellow wrapped themselves around me.

The demon lord Geld’s Death March Dance bolts danced around in the air, as if self-conscious, before coming in to swallow me. It was infused with Chaos Eater, and it had a mission to carry out.

In another moment, the elastic tendrils were around me. Even if they were still on the other side of my Multilayer Barrier, it still didn’t feel very pleasant.

—Yeah? You wanna consume me? Well, all right. Do it if you can!

Worked up as I was, my instincts commanded me to flash a weak smile.

If you wanna eat me, you’ll just get eaten first.

Silently, I removed my mask and put it in a pocket.

It was time for my clash with the demon lord Geld.

An impartial observer would probably assume that I’d have a hard time defeating the demon lord.

But slowly, I took out my sword, the yellow aura still around me. I didn’t like that aura, but it wasn’t dealing me much damage. I didn’t have Resist Rot in my arsenal, but it must have been dealing melee damage upon me—nothing I couldn’t cover for with Ultraspeed Regeneration.

Closing the distance between us, I slashed at Geld. He cleanly blocked me with his meat cleaver, sending me somersaulting. I should’ve expected as much. I couldn’t take Shion in a sword-on-sword clash, and she just lost to this guy. And Hakuro, who was on another plane of existence from me swordsmanship-wise, could do little against him.

I tried another slash, moving at hyper-speed to confuse my foe, trying to find any weakness I could from every angle I could think of. I knew it was pointless, but I couldn’t stop going through the cycle. Whenever I was blocked or swatted away, I just kept going back, testing it all out.

It assured me of one thing. I was weak.

I thought back to the five fighters I had directly under me, as well as Shuna and Kurobe. They had each inherited part of my skills, and in terms of using them, they were already far more expert at them than I was.

A refresher:

Ranga: Dark Lightning, Control Wind

Benimaru: Dark Flame, Control Flame

Hakuro: Hasten Thought

Shion: Steel Strength, Strengthen Body

Soei: Shadow Motion, Replication

Shuna: Analyze and Assess

Kurobe: Research

Even among the most typical of skills, the differences were obvious. The ones they inherited were either downgrades or incomplete versions of my own. Absolutely a step down, in all ways. But they were using them all far more effectively. If I fought each one-on-one, I was pretty sure I could win. Several at once? No way. That was how strong my fighters had become.

And despite that, the demon lord Geld probably could take them all in one go. And win. My Sage analysis of the battle results told me so. They all lacked a truly decisive weapon, and sooner or later they’d run out of energy and lose.

This wasn’t a foe I could beat if I fought normally. Emphasis on normally .

The ogres could use their skills far more deftly than I could. Why was that? For Hakuro, that was mainly just his high level at work, but what about the others? There were a few reasons—they mixed the skills with their own Arts, or their instincts allowed them to unleash their full potential without holding back. They had adopted the skills for themselves, and they could use them more efficiently than I ever could. That’s what made them strong.

Through my Sage-based simulations, I knew I’d have trouble defeating several at the same time. But was that really the case? And…really, was I “weak” at all?

To answer that—

Let’s start with an assumption.

Most of my skills were wrested away from other monsters. I wasn’t born with them, so I needed to start by understanding exactly what they were in the first place. You aren’t automatically handed a driver’s license just because you’re tall enough to sit behind a steering wheel—and you sure couldn’t expect to win a professional race that way.

But when I found myself transferred to this world, I did already have a skill or two. The skills I was born with, ones I could use as freely as snapping my fingers.

So all I needed was a single order.

“All right, Great Sage. Smash that foe for me!!”

Received. Switching to auto-battle mode.

—And there was my answer.

The demon lord Geld was overjoyed. Monsters with some actual backbone to them—and five at once!

Any monster formidable enough to make Geld feel pain would be more than welcome inside his stomach. He could eat the strongest he could find, and that would put him even farther down the road to demon lord evolution.

Just as he was about to swallow them up, another monster blocked his way. Geld was hungry. He had taken severe damage, and he needed flesh and blood to heal himself. That was why this monster in his way riled him up so much, this strange creature wearing a mask.

Worthless minion , he thought. He bore almost no palpable aura and looked like just another human. He had seen him sprout wings and fly, however, so there was no doubting his monster origins.

The demon lord intended to kill this thing along with the five tidbits he already had in his sights. But it was so strange—Geld’s attacks seemed to do nothing. He would lose his five snacks before long.

Now this monster was standing before the demon lord, all alone. It removed his mask, revealing its true face—though it was more girl-like in appearance than anything, with hair as silvery as the moon. It looked cute, but the smile on its face was one of pure evil. Almost like it was looking forward to this upcoming battle.

The moment the mask was off, the aura it held back began wafting across the area. Geld sensed something was off. My imagination? I cannot even comprehend the bottom of this aura…

But despite his apprehensions, Geld was greeted with the sight of this creature unleashing a flurry of pointless attacks. Maybe it was his imagination after all.

I’ll eat you first, then!

If this puny insect got in the way of his meal, Geld had no reason to show mercy. And this creature had far more energy than he originally thought. A high-quality entrée.

Flicking away the annoying pest, Geld adjusted the grip on his meat cleaver, preparing for the final blow. But then the creature halted its silly assault, standing bolt upright on the ground.

What’s it doing now?

The girlish creature’s expression froze, completely bereft of emotion. And then, it looked at him. Those eyes—they shone like gold, as if appraising him. Geld wondered what it meant. Then he realized there was an arm right in front of him.

…?!

He knew what had happened, but hesitated to accept it as fact. His own left arm had been severed at the elbow in an instant, and sent flying in front of his eyes. Then it was turned to ashes with Dark Flame.

The sword in the monster’s hand was wreathed in a dark flame. It burned without heat, but it had vaporized the severed arm in milliseconds. The temperature levels must have been surreal.

…An enemy?

Yes. An enemy. This thing he treated as nothing more than food before. Now, things had changed. The foe projected a much larger presence now.

The first enemy the demon lord had faced since his evolution made him anxious from head to toe. He began to feel physically uncomfortable.

No… My arm won’t regenerate?!

He checked his own arm. It was burning at the end with Dark Flame that never seemed to extinguish. It was keeping him from healing, its aura now connected to his enemy’s. As long as he didn’t kill the foe who had put this upon him, the flame would never disappear.

Anger began coloring Geld’s eyes. He ripped the remainder of the arm off at the shoulder, consuming it in several large bites, before regenerating the arm from the socket. Then he thought for a moment. If he didn’t have enough power before, he could just use his skills to compensate. This foe’s speed was exemplary, but Geld held the power advantage. If he could just crush it, all that speed would be his.

Matching his meat cleaver with this monster’s moves—nimbler than ever before—he blocked the full brunt of the enemy’s force. But the moment sword met cleaver, the Dark Flame swallowed it whole, melting it.

No…!

The demon lord Geld reared back, shocked. Was this an enemy? No. It was a threat. He had to consume it with every power he had at his disposal. Otherwise, he finally realized, he would be the one eaten.

Geld’s aura swelled, releasing a shock wave of force. He watched the monster elude it, then unleashed Death March Dance once more. The magical bolt split into eight in midair, each bolt hurtling toward its target. Each one was enhanced with Ravenous, bestowed with the Rot property.

The monster evaded them as they flitted through the air, absorbing each one of its pursuers.

Geld laughed. Now you will be consumed!

The five fighters from before no longer figured in his mind. All that mattered was the prey in front of him.

The monster was still distracted by the magic bolts. He confronted it, reaching out for its body. The foe noticed just in time. It turned, then began to grapple with him. Geld had the strength advantage. I could crush it now , he thought.

But then he fell, his balance lost. The foe had kicked him in the knee, shattering it. This innocent little girl. It was unimaginable, how quick the strike, how brutal the impact.

Geld refused to let go. Gah-ha-ha-ha-ha! I like it! I’ll eat you just as you are!

The prey was in his hands, ready for the first bite. It was helpless now. A little bit of damage was of no concern to Geld. Even that shattered knee was already regenerated, good as new.

The demon lord filled his palm with the yellow aura, preparing to infuse it into his prey. Ravenous allowed him to rot his foes directly with a single touch, arresting all their life functions and converting them into more nutrients for him.

Every fiber of his being desired to eat this creature, every ounce of energy poured toward his Rot skill. And in a moment, his opponent would stop resisting, as its body slowly melted into nothing…

Things have unfolded just as I thought.

With the full support of the Great Sage unique skill, I was now fighting with my skills at maximum efficiency. I was making complete use of them, but it wasn’t because I had leveled up or anything. I wasn’t “fighting” so much as I was letting the Sage do the fighting for me. It was a totally optimized approach, leaving everything to good ol’ Sage. Just as I figured, it demonstrated perfect mastery of my skills.

Once I knew I couldn’t overpower Geld, I placed a Multilayer Barrier over my sword and imbued it with Dark Flame. This kept the sword from deteriorating over time, greatly boosting its attack force along the way.

Even the skills I never managed to use too well were expertly handled by the Sage. It processed all the data at hand and always chose the most effective move to make next. It was covering the entire board as it figured out how to handle the demon lord, like a chess problem.

But even then, I couldn’t let up. Geld was starting to keep up with me speed-wise, and if this battle kept going, it might get worse. And if Resist Flame was one of the potential upgrades, I had nothing on him.

Hell, for all I knew, we were already at that point. And besides, everything I had for myself applied equally to the demon lord Geld. He had only just evolved; he was unfamiliar with whatever he had just inherited. Whatever advantage I had, I was losing it with every moment I dawdled.

Geld was in the throes of evolution, much as I thought I was. That was why I had to wage the battle this way.

Grappling with him was exactly what the Sage predicted. It would prove difficult to burn Geld to a crisp with Dark Flame only. He healed so quickly that it’d take too much time to completely burn him up. It might be possible if we could capture him in a Flare Circle, though, and that was why I had to subdue him first.

So I had instantly overwhelmed my opponent, inviting him to fight using the skills he was most familiar with. The demon lord fell for it beautifully, accepting my test of strength.

Just like the Sage predicted, Geld wanted to rot me, then consume me. If I could deploy a Flare Circle before then, I won.

I had to hand it to the Sage—it had read the guy like a book. But now the one possibility I had given a passing thought to—the one the Sage dismissed as too infinitesimally unlikely to happen—became reality.

“Gah-ha-ha-ha! Flame doesn’t work on me, you know!”

I had locked myself in a Ranged Barrier with him. The Flare Circle was now under way—and the demon lord Geld, who was supposed to be bursting into flames now that it was several thousand degrees around us, was instead heartily laughing in my face.

I hate it when these worst-case scenarios become reality.

…?! Report. Enemy confirmed to have resistance to flame. Requesting immediate alterations to plan…

The Great Sage came back online, sounding the same as always, even if I imagined it sounding a tad unnerved.

This was terrible. Horrible, really. Right at the climax of it all, my enemy had just checkmated me. But—why, though? There was still no anxiety or concern in my heart. As if I had hoped this would happen all along.

“Oh really?” I said, flashing a proud smile. “Because you might be a lot happier succumbing to the flames soon.”

The Chaos Eater that served as Geld’s aura was starting to make its way through my Multilayer Barrier. It didn’t hurt, but it was making me intensely uncomfortable as it wended its way around my skin. And yet—I still felt nothing but joy. It was what I wanted. He was my enemy, and he had to give me this much, at least.

I got this , I silently told the Sage, retaking control of my body. The Sage, while taking over, had allowed me to observe Geld at close range. Taking full advantage of the break, I had accelerated my thoughts a thousand times to consider what to do if the unlikeliest of events occurred.

A computer that never makes mistakes tends to see everything as a probability. It seeks efficiency, cutting away anything it deems redundant. That was why I was here. I was a ball of inefficiency, a former human with a deliberately incomplete thought process.

So don’t be disappointed, partner , I whispered in my heart as I sneered at the demon lord. You were perfect. Just leave the rest to me…

This guy wanted to consume me. That prediction came true, at least. And that meant I had an opening.

A little while back, I was a tad overoptimistic, reasoning that I should have eaten the demon lord back when I still had the chance. Right? And I was, at the core, a slime. I had exactly three intrinsic skills: Absorb, Dissolve, and Self-Regeneration. They were gone now, merged with assorted other skills, but I also had a unique skill—Predator—that was an enhanced version of them all. It suited me perfectly as a slime. Nothing could’ve worked better with my inner essence.

I doubted that my evolved Ultraspeed Regeneration was any less incredible at healing than whatever the demon lord was sporting. Which meant that if we started consuming each other, I was bound to win in the end, right?

…Report. The probability of you executing Predator first is—

The “probability” doesn’t matter. Quit worrying. I told you to leave the rest to me, didn’t I? Either the demon lord Geld rots and kills me, or I consume him first. It couldn’t have been any simpler, and I was ready to do it, even if my chances were exactly zero percent.

Why? Because that was my plan from the very start.

The demon lord, apparently pretty sure of his own victory, was now trying to melt me, looking every bit as elated as I was. I could take advantage of that, pretending to be rotting away—weakening—as my body fell apart. Apart, and over him.

From my opponent’s palm, through his arm…

And by the time he noticed, the operation was under way.

Letting my instincts take the wheel, I had engaged my enemy the way that slimes naturally do. Concern now crossed his face. He tried to peel me off, but he couldn’t—I was already all over his body.

“You see now? Sorry, but all that strength of yours doesn’t mean too much now, does it?”

“Gnh… No…?! What are you trying to…”

“Heh. If you thought you had an exclusive license on consuming stuff, you’re wrong.”

Nailed him. And Geld knew it. He winced at my words.

But I still wasn’t necessarily at an advantage. We were, for the moment, at a stalemate. He was using his healing skills to resist my Predation, and I was using Ultraspeed Regeneration to keep afloat over his Rot attack. We were eating away at each other, like an ouroboros come to life. The Great Sage was too much of a perfectionist to ever come up with something like this, but it was exactly what I wanted.

Whichever side consumed the other was the winner. The rules were so easy to understand. And getting myself into this situation in the first place was a requirement if I wanted to win. It wasn’t that I came up with the idea after the Sage’s tactics failed; I just followed my instincts, and this was what resulted, really. Instead of relying on unfamiliar, unseasoned skills, I relied on whatever my instincts willed for me, at the root, and executed what they told me. The slime’s Absorb and Dissolve skills had been merged into Predator, and so I was doing what those instincts wanted for me. I am, after all, a predator.



Geld, your Ravenous is a powerful unique skill, I’ll grant you that. But you’re not a predator. You’re a scavenger. You can eat anything, which is incredible, but I’m adapted for catching and consuming. And that gives me the advantage. If we’re gonna keep eating at each other, I’ll be the one to gain new skills from it first.

My Predaceous instincts will it to be done! I can analyze and obtain skills even from living creatures, but you, Geld—you can only steal them from their corpses. And that’s what will decide this.

It was hard to say how much time passed. We were still consuming each other. I concentrated on Predation, assured of my victory, when I started to hear the strangest voice.

I can’t afford to lose.

I ate my own comrades.

I can’t afford to lose.

I have to become a demon lord.

Because I ate Lord Gelmud.

I can’t afford to lose.

My comrades hunger.

I can’t afford to lose.

I must eat until I am full!

The thoughts flooded my mind. They belonged to the demon lord, I assumed.

Talk about stupid. Think whatever you like, I’ve already won.

But I can’t afford to lose…

I ate my own comrades.

I committed…a terrible crime…

I can’t afford to lose.

Look, can you forget it already?

Lemme tell you.

This world’s all about survival of the fittest. And you aren’t fit enough.

So you’re gonna die.

But I can’t afford to lose…

If I die, I leave the sins of my crimes to my comrades.

I don’t mind if I, alone, am sinful.

I did whatever was needed to avoid starvation.

I will become a demon lord.

I will accept all the hunger in the world. So no one else has to feel this famine!

I know I can.

I am an Orc Disaster.

The consumer of all.

Aaaaand you’re still gonna die.

But don’t worry.

I’ll eat up all those crimes for you.

You…what?

Eat…my crimes?!

Mm-hmm.

And not just yours…

I’ll eat the crimes of all your friends, too.

The crimes…of all my friends…

How greedy of you.

You think so?

Yeah. I am greedy.

Does that make you feel better?

If it does, then just rest a bit and let me eat you already.

Ah…

I couldn’t afford to lose.

But…

I am tired. It is…warm in here.

Greedy one.

You know there will be no tranquility down the road you travel.

But you are still willing to take on my crimes…

I thank you.

My hunger…is sated.

He was Geld, the Orc Disaster.

And now, his consciousness had vanished within me.

Confirmed. The Orc Disaster has disappeared. The unique skill Ravenous has been absorbed and merged with the unique skill Predator.

So I win.

There was no way someone as hungry as he was could beat me without starving himself in the process.

I opened my eyes, carrying the weight of him and all his orcish comrades on my back.

In the quiet, I declared my victory.

“I have won,” I said. “Rest in peace, Orc Disaster Geld…”

I could hear the cheers from the goblins and lizardmen, along with cries of anguish and despair from the orcs. Their conquest was over. They knew it, and from the thoughts they shared as they cannibalized one another before, they knew it was all caused by Gelmud’s nefarious plans.

What bothered me most was that the person or persons controlling Gelmud were quite likely still alive. He talked about having a demon lord patron backing him up, and there was no way to tell if that was the truth or not.

I’d probably need to be careful—but careful about what? I had no idea. And I could hardly leave these orcs to their own devices. We had problems left to solve.

The next day there was a very important meeting—one that would go down in history as the one that established the Great Forest of Jura Alliance.

