Prologue

Clowns on the Run

Yuuki Kagurazaka was a genius.

In his original world, he already possessed a special power. Mental force—so-called psychokinesis—a superpower, one that he was born with. However, he never intended to make use of this power. Because he knew that if others were to discover his power, he would become a spectacle.

Despite the monotony of daily life, he seemed to enjoy himself. He had loving parents and plenty of friends. Making money was easy for him. As long as he wanted it, there was nothing he couldn’t get. There was nothing he wasn’t satisfied with.

Yet, one fateful day, tragedy struck. Just as he started middle school, both of Yuuki’s parents died in a car accident. It was not his parents’ fault. The Kagurazaka’s car was struck by a truck driver who was dozing off behind the wheel. Only Yuuki, who was sleeping in the backseat, survived.

Yuuki found it incredibly unfair. He hated the guilty driver but could not do anything about it. Japan was a nation of law and order, and taking personal revenge was illegal.

When the verdict of the trial came, he realized various things. He realized the incompetence of the transport company, given that they contracted the work under unreasonable conditions. They put all the pressure on their employed field workers, and these workers had to keep working despite being overworked. The driver was a victim in a sense, too.

Then the fault would fall on the transport company—but that was not true, either. If they were to decline the request from their important clients, they wouldn’t order from them in the future. One doesn’t simply turn down an old client’s requests. In that case, they would need to improve the management of their business, but it wasn’t easy hiring experienced drivers, either. Even if the company wanted to hire young talent and train them, their circumstances right now would not allow them to spare the effort.

What is this—Yuuki couldn’t help but exclaim. There were so many unfair things in this world, yet his hands were bound.

Who should he hate?

At the end of the day, the fault lay with the flawed societal structure. He yearned to take his revenge against this society. But there was nothing Yuuki could do. He was a genius, but quickly realized his limit.

This world was already highly developed. Even with his superpower, it was not enough to make an impact. He had no chance of winning against an army. And even if he could, there was no future for him if he did.

Yuuki also thought about destroying society and rebuilding it from the ground up… But that would plunge many into misfortune. He couldn’t do such a thing.

If he really wanted to change society as a whole, he would have to do it step by step, slowly increasing the number of like-minded companions. Only when he became a politician would he be able to shape this country into his image. This was the only solution within his reach. But walking this path would require patience. It was a feasible goal, were he to work assiduously, but that would still take a matter of decades.

Yuuki was torn.

But before he could come to a conclusion, he found himself in the other world.

Was this a blessing or a curse?

Yuuki was summoned by the demon lord Kazalim and his deep-seated resentment. He had lost his physical body and became purely spiritual instead. But he never lost his power as the “Curse Lord.”

He spent a long time preparing for his resurrection. In order to see this to fruition, he resorted to summoning a body that was compatible with his spiritual body. Naturally, he needed to make sure that the being he summoned was carefully restrained. No misstep was allowed in this ritual, so as a precaution, he used his domination power to engrave a curse before summoning.

First, he would crush the mind of the one he wanted to summon, before the target even knew what hit it. Next, Kazalim would deprive its soul’s power and take its body to resurrect himself. That was the gist of his plan.

There was only one thing Kazalim hadn’t accounted for—the person he summoned being Yuuki.

The curse proved ineffective. With his genius, Yuuki already grasped the rules of this world. When he crossed worlds, he acquired the power he so wanted—the power to change the world. It was soul power—a pure form of energy that could freely adapt its nature. Its name was Unique Skill ‘Creator.’ When he told Rimuru that he didn’t have any special ability, he lied as naturally as he breathed.

His first act of creation, using his Skill, was to create the ability that would nullify evil intentions against himself: ‘Anti-Skill.’ At that moment, Kazalim’s scheme was ruined.

He even lost to Yuuki, becoming his servant in the process.

Yuuki, on the other hand, discovered his raison d’être in this world. This was a world where the strong trampled the weak. It was built on an imperfect system that still had a long way to go until it was fully developed. And so, Yuuki thought that if he could become the ruler of this world, then he could lead this world in the right direction.

Yuuki was determined to challenge this unjust world head on. His next step was to wage war against this world itself.

Conquering the world—Yuuki began moving towards his goal.

Yuuki, accompanied by Laplace, Footman, and Teare, escaped from the chaos they unleashed at the church. Their first priority was to escape from the Holy Empire of Lubelius. While it was tempting to hang around a little longer to watch the chaos unfold, it wasn’t worth the risk.

The berserk Hero Chronoa wasn’t a force to be taken lightly, and she certainly was not someone Yuuki could control. She was lashing out indiscriminately. Everyone there was her enemy. She was a truly terrifying force.

Granbell must have known this when he asked to cooperate with Yuuki.

It was a tough pill for him to swallow, but Yuuki had to admit that he’d simply been outsmarted this time.

“Ain’t we the biggest losers here,” Laplace complained. “All that work distracting Demon Lord Luminas to get an opening, and we were this close to gettin’ the ultimate weapon, the Hero…”

“Hohoho,” Footman chuckled, “that one’s on a whole other level. It’s a shame we let it go, but everyone who took that thing on has gotta be dead by now.”

Footman had a point, but Yuuki was far from convinced about the latter. The Hero couldn’t possibly have dispatched everyone there that easily, he thought.

“We can’t guarantee that, though,” Laplace remarked. No matter how you put it, Demon Lord Rimuru is stupidly powerful. Plus, Luminas and Leon were there too. With three demon lords and several powerful majins, both sides had equal chances of winning.

“You have a point. Granbell is an ex-Hero, so he’s also pretty strong. I wouldn’t bet on who won out in the end there,” Teare added.

Those two were not as optimistic as Footman. Like Yuuki, they thought that Rimuru and his entourage had a chance of winning against Chronoa.

To Yuuki, Chronoa winning would be the best possible outcome. If that were the case, not only could he get rid of the nuisance Rimuru and the hindering Granbell, but also the future threats, namely Luminas and Leon, whom the clowns despised. All these threats would disappear, and it would essentially put control over the entire West in Yuuki’s hands.

The only remaining wild card would be Chronoa, which would be tough to deal with. But considering that she lacked self-consciousness, there was nothing to fear. By using a couple monsters as bait, they’d be able to lure her off to some far corner of the desert anyway.

Raw strength alone wasn’t enough to pose a threat in Yuuki’s eyes. That’s why he wanted to stay behind and watch the battle play out…

“Actually, running away is the right choice. If we got caught in the crossfire, we’d be taking a lot of hits. Besides—”

I had an ominous feeling—Yuuki’s instinct kicked in.

In order to make plans for the future, he needed to analyze this chaotic fight. Even though he wanted to stay, Yuuki chose to trust his instinct and fled alongside the troupe.

If Chronoa were defeated, the surviving demon lords would surely consider them a thorn in their side. Rimuru seemed to have already noticed Yuuki’s betrayal. He won’t be able to make excuses anymore.

The territories and reputation he built in the West would go to waste due to this blunder. He only had himself to blame for having fallen into Granbell’s trap. He was merely reaping what he’d sown.

This was why he chose to flee as soon as possible. He could no longer hesitate. One of Yuuki’s strengths was that he was decisive. He had made it through countless challenges with his judgement.

This time is the same, Yuuki thought to himself.

But not a moment too soon, his naive plan hit a brick wall.

It happened in an instant. As Yuuki and his entourage were about to escape, a man suddenly stood in front of them. Beside him was an eye-catching, blue-haired beauty, wearing a rather out-of-place crimson maid uniform.

“Huh?!”

“Who’re ya?”

Yuuki stopped, sensing danger.

The man didn’t respond to Laplace’s question. He was staring straight at Yuuki, ignoring everyone else.

“Hohoho, if you insist on getting in our way—”

Footman, who was standing in front, went to attack the man and woman. Instead, a figure suddenly appeared and pinned Footman to the ground with one hand.

It was another woman, wearing the same crimson maid uniform as the blue-haired one. This one, though, had green hair. Needless to say, it was Mizeri, who had been busy sabotaging the Ingracia Kingdom until just a few hours ago. Due to Testarossa’s interference, she had to stop her meddling, and quickly came here thereafter.

Since Mizeri had come, it obviously followed that the blue-haired beauty was Raine. Both of them were accompanying the one and only demon lord, Guy Crimson. Known as the Lord of Darkness, he was the strongest of the demon lords.

His crimson hair, a red sheen deeper than blood, fluttered in the wind. His crimson eyes, glimmering gold and silver stars, gazed down at Yuuki arrogantly.

“Yo. I think this is the first time we’ve met. You’ve done well to catch my attention.”

Guy’s gaze was locked on Yuuki. No one else was worthy of his eyes. That fact wasn’t lost on Yuuki, but he was conflicted over how that made him feel.

When Footman was easily beaten by Mizeri, he could measure just how strong they were. Or rather, he could tell by the color of their hair and by those special maid suits. Kagali—also known as Kazalim—and Clayman had mentioned these people. These three fit the bill.

In other words, the person in front of him stood at the top of the world. His position was Yuuki’s end goal. As long as his ambition was to conquer the world, he would have to clash with this enemy one day.

“Is that so? You must be the so-called strongest demon lord, Guy Crimson. It’s an honor to meet you. My name is Yuuki Kagurazaka. I never expected you to come to me; were you looking to team up?” Yuuki mustered a smile without being intimidated by Guy.

Naturally, that was just wishful thinking. He could tell just by looking at how Mizeri was handling Footman right now. It was plain as day that Guy and his maids did not come to forge any alliances.

Even though he was faced with overwhelming danger, Yuuki still tried to put on a friendly tone. This was his unique way of negotiating. He would often throw out a wild statement to get a reaction, in an attempt to gauge his enemies’ intentions.

“Ah-hahaha. You’re an interesting fellow. You’ve got plenty of guts to be saying that straight to my face. Now that’s not a bad proposition, but you seem to be Leon’s enemy. Besides, weren’t you planning to head east? I personally don’t want Rudra to accrue any more power.”

Negotiations failed.

Yuuki knew from the start that Guy would not have accepted the ludicrous proposal. But he didn’t let that discourage him, instead reading deeper into Guy’s words. Rudra was the name of the emperor of the Eastern Empire—the Nasca Namrium Ulmeria United Eastern Empire. He figured those two had some kind of relationship, one evidently tainted by bad blood.

So is he trying to get rid of us before we can run to the East? I don’t really want to make the strongest demon lord my enemy, but I suppose there’s no other way out, considering how things have developed…

He wouldn’t be able to avoid conflict with Guy. They had no chance of escaping unscathed. Under these circumstances, he couldn’t resort to trickery, either. With all other options blacked out, his best bet was going all out against Guy.

Yuuki finally came to a conclusion.

“Hmm—never mind, then. Since we’re enemies, this timing is impeccable. Before I move my base to the East, I can see just how strong the strongest demon lord is for myself,” Yuuki answered, practically taunting Guy.

An overwhelming sense of excitement welled from his heart. He had been hiding his full strength all this time, but he had to let loose against the strongest of the demon lords, if he wanted even an inkling of a chance.

The thought of failure never crossed his mind as he stepped forward 1 .

Yuuki was incredibly confident. So much so, that he wagered he could beat absolutely anyone in a one-on-one fight.

He saw Chronoa go berserk, which only reminded him of how dangerous she was. But that was all there was to it. It would be a tough battle, but he was sure that he would come out of top if he gave it his all.

She wasn’t alone though; there were still several hostile demon lords with her. That being Leon and Luminas. And that good-natured Rimuru, too, had surely guessed Yuuki’s true intentions.

In reality, Rimuru had known Yuuki was an enemy for quite a while now. But it was better for Yuuki that he did. Otherwise, had he continued his innocent charade in an attempt to manipulate Rimuru, it could’ve easily backfired. Yuuki had been oblivious to this, but he definitely made the right call. Rimuru was his enemy.

Despite his confidence, he wasn’t so reckless as to take on three demon lords and Chronoa at the same time. Even without his premonition, he would’ve opted to get out of the fray as fast as he could.

However, this time was different. This ominous feeling was because of the man standing in front of him.

Yuuki understood this, but still decided to face the challenge head-on.

“Oh, do you think you can defeat me?” Guy smirked.

“I suppose. I plan to defeat you sometime in the future anyway. I’m just doing this a bit ahead of schedule.”

Raine and Mizeri seethed with anger. They really wanted to kill him, but without Guy’s permission, they wouldn’t even dare speak. Guy was the absolute authority, and it would be disrespectful to worry for his safety.

Guy was normally pretty fickle. Unless he recognized his opponent as worthy, he would crush the enemy mercilessly.

Raine and Mizeri worked hard to gain his approval, and if they were to cause any trouble, he wouldn’t hesitate to kill them. Guy was overwhelmingly powerful and could easily beat the two of them.

Laplace couldn’t move a muscle. Like a rabbit petrified by the gaze of a snake—that analogy seemed fitting.

If Laplace tried to save Footman, Raine would fight back. Even though Guy and the other primordials were outnumbered, the difference in class was insurmountable. If they were only fighting Raine and Mizeri, then they could probably figure out a way to pull through. But with Guy here too, they had no chance of winning.

To Laplace, Yuuki challenging Guy was suicide.

There’s no chance he’d win. We ain’t on this guy’s level. That Chronoa may be pretty strong, but this Guy Crimson is the real monster. We ain’t able to take him. We can’t run away, either. The plan that Boss has…it better work or we ain’t gonna survive…

Laplace deserved credit for having seen a fraction of Guy’s true power. Amazingly, considering the circumstances, Laplace was still thinking about ways to escape—that tenacity was one of Laplace’s greatest strengths.

He knew Yuuki was strong too, albeit constantly hiding his true strength from even his companions. Laplace didn’t know whether it would be enough to fight Guy or not…

If Yuuki couldn’t win, Laplace planned to save Footman and run away with Teare. Yuuki would surely catch on to Laplace’s plan and act accordingly. This would only work out because of their mutual trust.

The problem lay with Raine and Mizeri though. They were no ordinary enemies, either. They wouldn’t sit back and let him get a chance to help Footman. Laplace was rooted in place. He had to carefully weight his every move.

Gotta figure out a way to save Footman—while his mind was working on a solution, something unexpected happened.

“Hey, let him go,” Guy ordered Mizeri.

There was no way she’d go against his order. She quickly released Footman.

How complacent. But now we have a chance to escape.

Laplace began to think more positively, but it seemed things weren’t going to be that easy.

“Don’t worry, if you manage to beat me, I’ll let you guys go. I won’t touch even a hair on you guys.”

Guy’s challenge contradicted itself. If they could beat Guy, wouldn’t they be able to just walk away anyway? His declaration was troubling. The situation was becoming increasingly hopeless. He prayed that Yuuki would win as he watched the battle.

Yuuki was the first to move. With absolute confidence in his immunity to magic and Skills, he fearlessly launched a kick at Guy.

His kick was sharp, heavy, and combined with a feint. At first, his foot was closing in to sweep Guy’s legs, before jerking upward to land a clean uppercut. Despite Yuuki being the one to land a devastating kick, he ended up scrunching his face.

“Tsk, just how built are you?” he grumbled with a click of the tongue.

His ‘Anti-Skill’ was invincible and could penetrate all of his enemies’ defense. Yet, Guy stood still, unaffected by Yuuki’s hit. It was as if he didn’t feel any pain at all. He had done no trickery whatsoever. Guy’s body was simply harder than diamond. Being both tough and flexible, little could stand in his way. That neatly described just how powerful Guy was.

“Hahaha, that tickled. I’d hardly call this a fight. Entertain me more, or I’ll kill everyone here,” Guy laughed as he ignited a small flame in his palm.

It was the elemental magic ‘Napalm Burst’ 2 —a jet of flames that took the shape of a dragon, diving at his target with its long and narrow body. Its goal was to relentlessly attack the target until they were toasted. Burning at several thousand degrees, any normal man would become charcoal in an instant.

This flame dragon closed in on Yuuki.

“It’s a waste of effort!” Yuuki shouted. “Magic doesn’t work on m—” he was about to take another careless swing at Guy when suddenly a shiver ran down his spine and he jumped away.

“Ho, your instincts are quite sharp,” Guy said with a smile.

Yuuki had no time to retort, as he had thrown himself on the ground and was rolling around, trying to quell the flames. 3 Without a doubt, the effect of ‘Anti-Skill’ prevented Yuuki from getting harmed by Guy’s magic. However, at the same time, the supposedly nullified magical flame was still burning. It didn’t behave like a typical magical flame—this one burnt oxygen, depriving it from the air. A tad too slow, and Yuuki would likely have suffocated.

Although it felt like a long time, it all happened in the span of just a few seconds, meaning Yuuki got off without getting hurt. Had he not noticed the depleting oxygen, he would have continued attacking Guy and definitely tasted defeat. Having realized this in time, he opted to extinguish the fire, despite it making him look like a buffoon.

And from Guy’s reaction, a daunting thought settled in Yuuki’s mind. While he didn’t want to admit it, he had to be sure. Without necessarily expecting Guy to give him an answer, he took a chance and asked while standing up, “—Why didn’t you attack me again? Are you actually trying to fight me fair and square?”

“Ahahaha, don’t play dumb! Surely you have realized by now that I have already discovered the secret behind your power!”

“…”

As I suspected—Yuuki thought bitterly.

His ‘Anti-Skill’ was versatile and could cancel any form of power it encountered, but when it was used against Arts, which were made by fusing magic and a Skill, he could not nullify both of them at the same time. That was its only flaw—his only weakness.

All physical enhancements aside, Yuuki was still human. Even if he could fight toxins with antibodies, he could not live without oxygen. The weaknesses of his humanity, Yuuki now realized, put him at a disadvantage.

Guy stood there casually.

“I know someone who can cancel out magic perfectly, but I would still win in a fight. That’s because they couldn’t cancel anything other than magic. As far as I know, there is no way to completely defend against the laws of physics in this world. When you specialize in one thing, you’ll be vulnerable to another. But you don’t only seem to be able to counter magic, but Skills as well—”

Guy, looking down on Yuuki, revealed his thoughts without attacking any further. His lax attitude was all calculated.

It would’ve been easy for Guy to kill Yuuki outright, but that wouldn’t have been fun. Instead, Guy wanted to destroy Yuuki’s confidence first, and then watch him admit defeat in despair.

He had figured out Yuuki’s physical constitution when Yuuki first attacked. Guy had already seen through his quirk. He even planned a counter for it.

So what if Yuuki was able to cancel magic and Skills? As long as he was human, it would be a piece of cake to beat him. Humans are fragile. Their frail bodies had plenty of weaknesses to exploit. Guy didn’t need to think too hard to come up with various ways to kill a human.

Besides, Yuuki’s physical abilities were far inferior to Guy. When Yuuki launched his kick, Guy only left a tiny ‘Barrier’ as defense, but even that was too much for Yuuki’s kick to penetrate, leaving not even a nick.

In terms of magicule capacity, comparing the two of them was almost comical. Guy’s magicules could rival a ‘True Dragon,’ so even if Yuuki canceled his magic, he could immediately recast it without a hitch.

“If I just wanted to kill you, then I wouldn’t have come here myself. Now since I’m here, you’d better amuse me,” Guy provoked Yuuki, arrogant as he stood over him.

He wanted to make Yuuki desperate enough to go all out. And then he would promptly beat him to a pulp.

Yuuki had painfully figured out what Guy was planning, but he couldn’t muster a retort. His remaining confidence disappeared from his face. He started analyzing the situation, desperately trying to figure out a way to get through this.

His genius brain had come to the conclusion that the gap in power was lightyears across, but Yuuki was not going to give up. He was searching for all possibilities. The only ray of hope he could grasp onto was that Guy was underestimating them.

I can’t fault him for looking down on me when he really is leagues ahead. But as it stands, he’s a bit too cocky.

Yuuki had other trump cards. They were the superpower he was born with, as well as the ‘Greedy One’ he had taken from Mariabell. In addition, he had his ‘Creator,’ which could create whatever Skill he required for the situation. Using ‘Creator’ could help him overcome this disaster.

You’ll regret that you didn’t kill me when you had the chance!

Steadying his breath, Yuuki faced Guy again.

“Don’t get cocky just because I’ve shown a fraction of my power.”

He wasn’t being a sore loser—he meant it. If he could make his opponent angry, he would lose composure and make mistakes. That was his plan.

As he spoke, Yuuki allowed his power to surge through his body. He now used the power he usually suppressed, concentrating his mind on a singular task, to remodel his body to fit his will He evolved from a human to a ‘Sage,’ and then once more to become a ‘Saint.’ He evolved to a form surpassing Hinata herself, and ceased to breathe. A fully evolved ‘Saint’ was equal to a spiritual life form. While Hinata was still being limited by her body, Yuuki had reached a higher plane of existence. Now, he had overcome the need to breathe at all. He cast out the weaknesses of humanity and greatly elevated his existence. If he were to convert all his energy into magicules, he could rival Leon and Luminas.

Yet, Guy was not fazed by this either.

“How disappointing. Is that all you’re capable of? You won’t be able to win against me, even if we fought a million times over,” he said dismissively, nonchalant as always.

“Perhaps. In that case, I’ll do my best to entertain you!”

Yuuki’s proclamation kicked off the battle anew.

…A second later, Yuuki learned why Guy was regarded as the strongest demon lord.

The scene was desperate. Yuuki was lying on the ground, physically outmatched. Against Guy’s overwhelming strength, none of Yuuki’s attacks worked. It was no use trying any more tricks. Not even his strongest, most polished attack could leave a scratch on Guy.

“Dammit, damn it all!”

Yuuki didn’t have the strength to even get up again. The most he could do was curse at Guy. At this point his prevailing resilience was praiseworthy.

Laplace’s eyes were glued to the battle. He could never forget what he saw unfold.

This is just too wild. It ain’t Boss being too weak, it’s Guy being outta this world…

Yuuki’s strength exceeded Laplace’s imagination.

Making use of his strange power, psychokinesis, Yuuki was pulling out all the stops to see what would work on Guy. He was lobbing stones, igniting fires, applying force, and releasing mental interference waves. Yet, all of this was easily countered. Even though he was using ridiculous strength, thirty times stronger than an average human, to launch attacks at speeds over a hundred meters per second, his attacks were child’s play to Guy.

Yuuki’s primary way of defense, ‘Anti-Skill,’ was no exception. It was unable to stop Guy’s magic after a few hits.

“That won’t work on me anymore,” Guy taunted.

It appeared that he had figured out how to counter ‘Anti-Skill’ somehow. That was a horrifying fact.

Kazalim and Clayman had mentioned the Ten Great Demon Lords in the past. They had emphasized that Guy and Milim were particularly strong, but this vast difference was unfathomable. Had they been aware of it sooner, they would never have agreed to the naive ambition of conquering the world.

So this the power of a Catastrophe-class…

Laplace had finally learned his place in the food chain, and that he should avoid those at the top. He had always chosen to hide his true strength from even his closest companions, yet against a demon lord like Guy, he wouldn’t have even made a scratch. Guy was on a whole other plane of existence compared to them.

Laplace couldn’t even spot an opening for an attack. Even Yuuki, who was certainly stronger than him, was lying helplessly on the ground like a baby. With how things had developed, it’d be easier to travel to space than to come out of this alive.

Someone has to make a sacrifice—Laplace made up his mind. He put on his usual half-hearted attitude and stepped in front of Guy.

“Magnificent, Demon Lord Guy-sama. We, the ‘Moderate Clown Troupe,’ are open to any business requests. Currently, we are already employed by Yuuki over there. Since our boss has lost now, we may logically consider our contract terminated—”

“Huh!”

“Laplace, what are you sa—”

Laplace put on a front of betrayal, pretending to betray his companions, though rather flippantly. He didn’t know what Guy’s personality was exactly, but heard he was remarkably selfish and arrogant. He seemed completely uninterested in the weak. Unless he recognized you, you were not permitted to speak with him.

Laplace approaching Guy with this attitude was flirting with death. But at the same time, it also meant that he had Guy’s attention. This could give Yuuki just enough time to make his escape. Laplace made his gamble.

Never betray your companions and never betray your client—that was the golden rule of the Moderate Clown Troupe. That’s why Laplace thought Yuuki would for sure be able to pick up on his unspoken plan.

Footman was too much of a loose cannon and not the sharpest tool in the shed. But he was also very thoughtful of his companions. Teare was actually stronger than Clayman, yet she was too timid to show her true ability. And even though both of them had the bad habit of getting over their heads sometimes, they worked fine under Yuuki. It was because of this that Laplace decided to sacrifice himself.

“I’m sure I’d be of help to Guy-sama. So what do ya say, at least spare me my life?” Laplace shamelessly declared in open treachery.

Footman and Teare were in utter confusion, while Guy looked on with curiosity, as the edges of his mouth slowly widened into a grin.

Great, I just have to keep this up and Guy will surely be pissed off!

Laplace didn’t plan to dig his own grave, either. There was little hope with Guy as your opponent, but he still had a slim chance of saving his life. That’s why he wasn’t going to hesitate anymore and decided to finish his sentence.

But just before he could say it out loud—

“A-ha-ha, don’t push yourself like that, Laplace. Seriously, am I really that unreliable?”

Someone spoke before Laplace. It was Yuuki, shakily standing up.

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Yuuki braced himself for his own death.

At this moment, his heart filled with unquenchable resentment. He was angry at his own powerlessness. He was even angrier when he heard what Laplace said.

Yuuki had managed to interpret Laplace’s words correctly. Laplace would never betray him. In other words, what he had said was all an act. Even when Yuuki was in such a sorry state, Laplace still chose to have faith in him.

His mind was swirling with joy, but also guilt.

If only I had more power…

Realistically, nobody would be there to respond to his desperate thought. Yet at that moment, something spoke inside Yuuki’s mind.

«…You want power? You need my help.»

Yuuki was baffled. He thought he might’ve been hallucinating from the exhaustion, but the voice definitely sounded real.

«Just trade places with me. You will obtain the strongest power. Your wish is to conquer the world. Taking my help will make it a cakewalk. Come on, make your decision.»

The strange voice’s proposition irritated Yuuki.

Shut up. I am me. It may be different from borrowing the strength of my companions, but I won’t stoop so low as to borrow a stranger’s power to fulfill my ambition.

Yuuki was confident in his choice to reject the offer. After all, going after a personal ambition would only be meaningful if it were achieved without outside help. Yuuki had his principles, too.

«……»

The voice fell silent, seemingly confused about his unexpected response.

Changing gears, Yuuki quickly brought his mind back to the situation at hand, disregarding the voice he could no longer hear.

Even though the situation had become desperate, something caught Yuuki’s attention. He realized that Guy must’ve had some goal. Indeed, while Guy likely wanted to engage in battle, there must be some other reason.

Guy said something along the lines of: “I don’t want Rudra to gain more strength.” In other words, if he would not go into the Eastern Empire and assist Rudra, Guy wouldn’t need to kill Yuuki and his companions. At least, that’s how Yuuki interpreted it.

So, then why didn’t Guy kill Yuuki immediately…?

Seriously, toe to toe, I have no chance against him. My next play is a battle of wits. But instead of Laplace offering to take the fall, this will have a better chance of succeeding!

Yuuki regained his confidence and stood up once more.

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Yuuki brushed back his bangs and put on a defiant smile, in spite of his circumstances.

“I didn’t expect you to be so strong, clearly surpassing my calculations,” Yuuki conceded. “But I’ve seen through your plan. You weren’t going to kill us after all, were you?”

“Heh, what makes you think that?” Guy sneered.

“If you had planned to do that, you would have obliterated us by now. With each attack, you only ever left me on the brink of death, never finishing me off. Why?” The confidence in his voice was palpable. He was being incredibly reckless.

How could Yuuki talk to Guy like that after seeing his immense strength?

Nobody could understand Yuuki. Nobody except for Guy, who was rather intrigued.

“So you noticed, but you don’t need to know the answer.”

Guy’s response made it clear that he wouldn’t reveal anything else.

Yuuki shrugged. He had expected this answer, so he began to calmly execute his next plan.

“Then I want to make a deal with you.”

“You want to make a deal?”

“Yeah. If you let us go, we can be of help to you.”

“Be of help to me?”

“Indeed. It sounds like you don’t want us to join the Eastern Empire, but I hope I could sway your mind otherwise.”

“Keep going…”

“Since our goal is to conquer the world, we will eventually become an enemy of the Empire. I have experienced the extent of your great power just now. Knowing it, I don’t want to be your enemy. Because of that, destroying the Empire first would be much easier.”

Yuuki’s explanation was just confusing nonsense to everyone else. Footman and Teare were lost. Laplace was confused about the current situation, too. He was prepared to die for his plan, yet his only hope, Yuuki himself, threw a wrench into the whole thing. All that was left for him was to hope that Yuuki’s negotiations went well. Even so, Yuuki’s rash words made Laplace sweat profusely.

This is way too reckless. The reasoning is absurd, but why does it seem like Guy is enjoying this?

Indeed. As Yuuki said this, strangely, Guy cracked a smile.

“You still intend on challenging me?”

“That’s only natural. My ambition is to conquer the world, after all. Right now, I don’t seem to stand a chance against you. But one day, I’ll eventually surpass you.”

Yuuki could barely stand because of his wounds, yet he still talked big to Guy.

Thoughts like “pissing off Guy would get me killed” didn’t even cross Yuuki’s mind while he was talking.

But this was Guy he was talking to, so his attitude turned out to be the right call. Had he begun to pathetically plea for his life, Guy would’ve immediately lost interest—a surefire way to get them all killed.

Unbeknownst to him, he had played all his cards right.

“So you’re saying that it’ll be good for me if you manage to take down the Empire?”

The conversation had reached its turning point. Yuuki had to execute his plan cautiously. He shifted his gaze back to Guy and nodded affirmatively.

“Of course. I don’t know the exact reason, but you don’t seem to want the Empire to invade the West. Is that right?”

“…”

Guy must have some connection with the emperor, Rudra.

That was the key. Yuuki turned up the act.

“I have many enemies ahead of me to bring down, and I intend to join the Empire. However, I don’t intend to be under its control. Instead, I will destroy it from within and turn it into a puppet of ours.”

“Hrm, I see. You will get help from the Empire while your goals still align, but they might not be the same afterward. You want to borrow the strength of the Empire to defeat Leon, and probably that Rimuru as well, right?”

Guy’s sharp eyes seemed to have seen through it all as he stared at Yuuki.

There was no turning back for him now. He didn’t know what kind of relationship Guy had with Leon, nor what he thought of Rimuru. He couldn’t even predict how Guy would react as he replied. Despite it all, Yuuki still decided to express his ambition deliberately.

“That’s right. I want to dominate the world, and I will beat you in the end—Demon Lord Guy Crimson-san,” Yuuki proclaimed with impudence.

It was up to Guy to interpret this.

Even if we followed Laplace’s plan, I doubt a single one of us would’ve seen another day. Sorry guys, but please play along with my plan.

Yuuki apologized to his companions in his heart.

It was all or nothing for them, and Yuuki was very greedy. If he lived, he would get everyone else out alive as well. The bet was incredibly risky.

However, Yuuki hit the jackpot.

“Are you guys seriously called the Moderate Clown Troupe? Because you sure act like clowns. You’ve thrown the entire playing field into disarray, like some kind of joker card. Your proposal is very interesting. Considering how bold you’ve been, I’ve decided to let you all go peacefully. However, don’t expect me to be merciful the next time we meet.”

In the end, there was no telling what Guy’s goal was. Whatever it was, what mattered now was that Yuuki and his companions were saved.

Raine and Mizeri couldn’t object to Guy’s decision. As soon as Guy said they could go, Yuuki and his companions fled on the spot.

After Guy and his servants left, Yuuki and the other clowns hurried to the agreed upon rendezvous point, where Kagali and the others were. Since there were no more threats, everyone thought that it was best to leave as quickly as possible.

Once he saw Kagali at the rendezvous point, Laplace spoke up to Yuuki.

“Ya gotta be kidding me… Unbelievable, to do something so bold in front of that monstrous Demon Lord Guy…”

“And we somehow managed to escape safely,” Teare added. “I honestly thought that we were screwed.”

“Hohoho, I had confidence in Boss from the start.”

That’s because you don’t use your brain—Laplace teased Footman. Yuuki saw the exchange from the corner of his eyes, and sat on the ground, exhausted.

“I was forced to come up with that plan on the spot, but that probably was the only way we could have gotten out of the situation alive. Thankfully, it worked in the end. I’m not taking any complaints from you guys.”

As opposed to the wounds he sustained in battle, his mind was far wearier. Yuuki didn’t want to argue any longer at this point. He lay down spread-eagle on the ground and closed his eyes.

Kagali had no clue what had happened, so Laplace and Teare began to explain the whole story.

“Y-you guys fought Guy! And you managed to come back unscathed…” Kagali couldn’t contain her shock, becoming utterly baffled.

Ah, it’s so good to be alive.

As the wind caressed Yuuki’s face, he let his thoughts wander.

Suddenly, he remembered something.

What was that mysterious voice he heard halfway through his battle?

Was it my alter-ego? No way, that sounds like some made up nonsense. Actually, hold on. Even though I don’t feel there’s any power hidden inside me, there’s one possibility that I could think of.

Yuuki recalled his recently acquired power. The Unique Skill ‘Greedy One’—with this Skill, the stronger his desire was, the more power it would grant him.

During his battle with Guy, not a single one of Yuuki’s attacks landed. This naturally included the powerful Skill ‘Greedy One,’ of the Deadly Sins series.

This ‘Greedy One’ sure is a mystery too, but there are always Skills and magic beyond my imagination. Guy managed to bypass my ‘Anti-Skill’ with his magic. I have to figure out how he did that…

Yuuki had an incredible amount of self-confidence, yet his ego took a huge hit after being taken down by Guy so easily. He wouldn’t give up that easily, though. Now that he managed to survive safe and sound, he must think of plans for the future. Yuuki’s greatest strength was that he could quickly refocus himself. He was once an extremely arrogant person, thinking that he had power even surpassing the demon lords.

No, even if I’m not the strongest, with the right amount of research and strategizing, I can beat any opponent I face.

Relying on the power he had and the assistance of Kagali, Laplace, and the others, he managed to build a powerful faction.

Everything was going smoothly. But lately, he was experiencing failure after failure. Moreover, Yuuki’s fight with Guy had completely destroyed his confidence. That being said, he was lucky to even be alive after that fight.

Things are getting very interesting. Some extra difficulty really spices up a game.

And so, Yuuki was not frustrated at his defeats. Instead, he pondered further on it.

Speaking of Guy’s ability, he was struggling to analyze it, even using his ‘Creator.’ Unique Skill ‘Creator’ was very special. Not only could it create Skills, but it could also analyze other people’s Unique Skills, provided they were using them, but Yuuki believed no one could hide their abilities against him.

And yet, it hadn’t worked on Guy. That meant that he had some power greater than Unique Skills.

Yuuki craved for power. He wanted stronger powers that would surpass Guy’s. Deep inside his heart, the flame of his desire burnt violently.

In that case, perhaps my ‘Greedy One’ has the chance to evolve, too. I am greedier than anyone; if I pour my desire into it—

Yuuki felt a shiver of excitement.

He started thinking hard. Losing to Guy had made him realize how unfair this world was. He wanted to fight it and emerge victorious—that was Yuuki’s wish. He closed his eyes and spoke to the voice inside his heart. He ventured to a place deep in his heart and continued to delve deeper until he reached the bottom of that abyss.

Yuuki observed the abyss carefully.

«So, are you ready to take my help now?»

No, that’s not my plan.

«Then what do you want?»

I have some business with you.

«Some business with me?»

Yes. I am going to take your power.

«Quit joking around.»

I’m not joking around. I am very serious, you know?

«Stop this nonsense—»

Sorry, but you’re in my way.

«Ah!»

The next second, his wish swelled to fill his entire mind. He desired his true ambition and its fulfillment. He didn’t want to be anyone’s servant. His strong will turned into a weapon. Yuuki was challenging himself.

Then, the Voice of the World rang out.

«Confirmed. Conditions satisfied. Unique Skill ‘Greedy One’ has evolved into Ultimate Skill ‘Greedy King Mammon.’»

Yuuki opened his eyes once more, now with a smug smirk.

“I’ll make good use of your power,” he muttered quietly enough that no one else could hear.

On that day, at that moment, at that place, the foulest majin was born.