

EPILOGUE

A MONSTER’S NATURAL ENEMY

Taking my leave of Yuuki and the children, I had reached the outskirts of the city. Away from the gaze of others, I figured I could use Spatial Motion to return home without further delay. I thought so anyway, but for some reason, the skill wouldn’t activate.

What’s going on?

Report. You are covered in a long-range barrier. Any spatial-intervention skills targeted for beyond the barrier are forbidden.

Huh?

I didn’t like the sound of that. In a way, I felt in more danger than I ever had before. When Milim attacked us, she didn’t really have any intention of killing anyone. I wasn’t overwhelmed with a sense of danger. Now, that sense was sounding its loudest alarms yet.

My suspicions were confirmed when I saw Soei appear before me, badly wounded.

“Sir—Sir Rimuru, you must flee at once—”

This Replication of Soei must’ve expended all its strength coming here. The body was already starting to fade into thin air.

“What happened?”

“Enemies, sir. More powerful than I could ever imagine—”

And then, he disappeared. I was sure his original body was okay, but these Replications were supposed to be on the same level as the original strength-wise, weren’t they? Did he fall into a trap or something?

I called for Ranga from my shadow. No reply. Just as the Great Sage warned, I was so shut away from the outside world that not even Ranga could intervene from beyond. This barrier must have been the spatial-division type, fully isolating me from beyond its borders. I could neither call for help nor run away from it.

The bad feeling I had was now pushing me into a panic. Just in case, I put out some insurance. Fortunately, there were no restrictions on my skills within the barrier itself, I didn’t think…but then I heard another warning.

Report. You are covered in a long-range barrier. Any skill usage within the barrier is forbidden… Resistance succeeded. However, restrictions are in place on all magic-oriented skills.

What? What’s going on here?! Magic-oriented kind of describes, like, all my magic and everything that involves controlling magicules! Things like Dark Flame and Dark Thunder were similarly restricted, as well as control-based skills like Sticky Steel Thread. This kind of barrier wasn’t in place even during that Sky Dragon attack before.

If there was someone capable of deploying a barrier like this, there was no way Soei wouldn’t have noticed. And if I was caught in this before he could warn me via Thought Communication, it had to be spread out across a vast amount of terrain. It felt safe to assume it wasn’t meant for someone else. This was an attack targeted squarely upon me.

For what purpose, though?

I waited for my foe to make itself known, steeling myself against the potentially lethal threat surrounding me. Even if I wanted to release this barrier, the Sage needed time to analyze it. I could begin the process immediately, but with such a broad range to cover, I’d need to wait a while. All I could do right now was wait for the enemy.

This was really bad. For the first time, I thought I felt my heart tremble with anxiety. It wasn’t an emotion I had experienced very often since coming to this world.

Becoming a slime had changed the structure of my mind, yes, but the biggest reason for that was because the Great Sage could always predict results for me in advance. Whenever I thought about doing something, it’d give me a general idea of how the plan would work out. That was what allowed me to fearlessly confront powerful-looking monsters. They might’ve looked strong, but the predictions, the odds, were already in my mind. On the other hand, if I knew for a fact that I couldn’t beat a foe, that wasn’t anything to strike anxiety in me. If I couldn’t win, I could just run. And if I couldn’t run, I could at least try for a parting shot before I got struck down.

This time, though, I was dealing with an unknown. I had nothing to make a prediction on—but I knew the enemy was out for blood. I didn’t know if I could win, and I couldn’t escape. I had no idea about their numbers. It had to be several people launching this long-range barrier, but Sense Heat Source told me that only one was approaching.

The magicules had seemed to disappear from within this barrier. Magic Sense wasn’t working. If I was booted out of human form, I wouldn’t even be able to see. Without that all-purpose vision, it’d be that much harder to grasp the situation around me. From the moment I was caught in here, my chances of winning plummeted.

But sealing away your foe’s abilities before the battle even begins… Yeah, that’s another way to fight, I guess. Get into range without being noticed, then deploy a barrier before the opponent can recognize it. The work of a professional, one well seasoned in monster combat.

If I had to guess, this barrier extended over at least a mile-long radius. It caught me completely off guard. I had to marvel at how well planned it was.

Time passed slowly…

“Hello. I suppose this is the first time we met? It’ll be good-bye before long, though.”

With that greeting, a woman appeared—right in front of me, alone. And with enormous self-confidence.

She was maybe twenty, maybe not quite there yet, and her frighteningly cold eyes contained the shine of a deep intelligence. The beauty to her countenance made the ice in her gaze even more striking. I didn’t remember meeting her, but there was something familiar about the sight.

Her shiny, beautiful black hair was cut above the shoulders, combed down and back on the right side and flowing down the left, not quite hiding her eyes. On that almost-hidden left eye, there was a monocle—perhaps just a fashion item, because she quickly removed it and put it in a pocket.

Her clothing was chiefly white—loose, easy to move in, and reminiscent of business attire. Her legs, visible underneath her short skirt, were long, thin, and covered in black stockings. The rest of her was covered in a robe of pure white, like something a cleric would wear. There was a cross symbol on the front of her collar, indicating she held a high position in the Western Holy Church.

This was a paladin, a Church-ordained guardian of law and order—and a sworn enemy of all monsters.

“I suppose it is, yes. What is it that you want from me? My name’s Rimuru, but perhaps you have me confused with someone else?”

It was pointless, but I thought I’d check anyway. She was obviously gunning for me. I doubted this was mistaken identity, but if it was, I definitely didn’t want to get killed over it.

“You certainly are polite, for the lord of the monster nation. No, there’s no mistake. Your town, you know… It’s a bother to us. So we’ve decided to crush it. That’s why we can’t have you going home quite yet. Do you understand me?”

There was no evil sneer with these words. It was plain, emotionless fact—just not the kind I was too interested in accepting. Plus, they knew I was running Tempest? What the heck?

“Why are you calling me a monster at all, much less a monster lord? I’m just a regular adventurer, as you can see.”

“Oh, playing dumb? Well, it won’t work. We have an informant. I won’t tell you who, but that’s how we received word. We have ‘eyes,’ you know, all over Englesia. You’d best keep your own eyes open—there’s no telling who may be watching.”

An informant? I couldn’t imagine who. I had an eye out for people tailing me—any skill-based teleport, I executed with the utmost caution. I didn’t get it, but I could tell that she was pretty sure about it. And about killing me.

This is really bad.

She was armed with nothing but the rapier dangling from her hip. There was no armor, but she seemed totally at ease. No one else was in the area, no indication that the person or persons who built the barrier would be swooping in to assist. They had this perfect trap for killing me, but it was only one of them? Or was that how strong this woman was?

There was no time to think. If she was telling the truth, there was a force out there trying to destroy Tempest. If they’d already started attacking, I didn’t have any time to sit here idly.

Which nation was it? Or a demon lord? No, not one of those. The Western Holy Church would never associate with monsters. We were bordered by Dwargon, Farmus, Blumund, and Thalion. I could cut Dwargon and Blumund out of that, which left two countries. Thalion wouldn’t make much sense—there wasn’t a path built to there yet, so their armies would have to go through another country first. Soei would’ve spotted that right off.

That made the Kingdom of Farmus my primary suspect. Assuming Farmus had an army raised, it’d take at least two weeks to march to Tempest. They’d need to find roads wide enough for their forces, which meant a long, circuitous route. Even if they advanced without rest, it’d take ten days. However, this world had something called legion magic, which if used efficiently enough, could easily cut that time down.

I couldn’t assume anything, but there was no time to waver now.

“So I guess you won’t believe me when I say you got the wrong guy.”

“No. I already heard the monster lord’s name was Rimuru.”

“Oh.”

Well, great. She knew me by name.

“So are you ready?”

“No,” I swiftly replied as the woman motioned to unsheathe her rapier, “but could you at least tell me your name first?”

The stunning woman gave me a bemused look. “Since when were monsters interested in names? It didn’t matter to me, so I forgot to tell you.” She smiled faintly. “In that case: I am Hinata Sakaguchi, captain of the Chief Knights of the Holy Imperial Guard, the faithful servants of Luminus in the Holy Empire of Lubelius. I am glad to make your acquaintance, although I fear it will be a very short one.”

Aha. So this is Hinata Sakaguchi.

“Hinata? I heard you were leader of the paladins, but you’re running Lubelis’s imperial guard, too?”

“You were aware of that? Not that it pleases me to be known among monsters. But yes, I am the holder of both positions, although it is meaningless. I serve Luminus, not the mortal Holy Emperor.”

She then drew her rapier, a clear sign that the conversation was over. The grip was decorated with seven small jewels, its blade a light shade of silver that was covered by the faint, rainbowlike glint of magical force.

I had heard she was kind of an extreme rationalist when it came to reaching her goals, but if so, she was kind of botching the endgame. Going out to defeat her foe single-handed… If she wanted to be sure about this, she should’ve brought enough manpower to make it a slam dunk. I gotta hand it to her info-gathering skills, though, knowing all about the Jura-Tempest Federation and me.

But I still didn’t like this. Hinata was ready to go, but it kinda pained me to fight a former student of Shizu’s. Could we talk this out a little, maybe…? I took out my own sword, readying it, but still gave that another shot.

“Wait a minute. There’s something I’d like to tell you, and then something I’d like to talk to you about.”

“I care not for the words of monsters,” she coldly replied as she jabbed at me with lightning-fast force. I could just barely keep up with it. If my nervous system weren’t directly connected to my brain, that would’ve broken skin. Sucks that they took Magic Sense from me.

“No, wait! You’re Japanese, aren’t you? Me too. Shizu asked me to—”

“I’m a little surprised you dodged that. I suppose you really are the monster who killed my teacher…but revenge will be mine soon. And a monster being Japanese? Miss Shizu asking a favor of you? How ridiculous. Don’t make me laugh.”

Not too interested in believing me, then. Or really, in having any sort of conversation. But I had one more idea.

“<No, really, I’m from Japan! It’s just that I died over there and got reborn as a slime here—>”

I said this in our native language. Hinata’s got to believe me. But her voice sounded colder than ever.

“So you speak Japanese. Just as I thought you would. There is no need for any more of this act.”

Instead of believing me, she acted as if I just added more fuel to her anger. What did she mean “Just as I thought you would”?! Does whoever leaked word about me to Hinata know I was Japanese? Because only a handful of people did— Or did she think I could speak Japanese because I claimed to be from there? Or was she just told that I killed Shizu and inferred that I must’ve known about other worlds and learned Japanese?!

That’s not just blind guesswork. That’s more…calculated by—

“—You really want to go through with this?” I asked. “You, by yourself?”

Even if she was an otherworlder and paladin, I still had demon lord–class combat strength. My skills were dulled, but there’s no way I could lose to a human like Hinata. That, at least, was my thought.

“Oh, now you make me laugh. You think you can win? Inside this barrier?”

She smiled a light, bewitching grin as she whispered the question. The next moment, a rainbow of colors shot out from the tip of her rapier—a supersonic slash. The afterimages of the jewels looked like a rainbow. I took evasive action, but my body felt heavy and my physical skills weakened. Too slow to react, I took three or so hits from her slashes.

Whoa, really?! I started to worry as searing pain raced across my body.

Pain? Don’t I have Cancel Pain for that…?

“Hmm… Just three strikes? Maybe I underestimated you.”

She may have said it, but her expression indicated she was in total control. Perhaps this pause was another part of her plan, because she kept striking, giving me not a single moment of rest. Holding my katana forward, I attempted to deflect the blows. But it was like she could slip right past it, letting her stabs and slashes work their way toward my body.

Driven by the instinctual realization something bad was happening, I reared back. That was the fourth strike. I felt like any more would be dangerous.

“Have you noticed the danger behind this skill?” She gave me another quizzical look. “There are some fools who confidently let themselves be struck, only to die completely helpless. You have some intelligence, I see.”

“Thanks for the compliment, but I’d be a lot happier if you’d be willing to hear out my whole story…”

Understood. This arts-based skill is believed to be a direct attack on one’s spiritual body, not the material one.

So the Sage says it’s directly affecting my very spirit…? No wonder it slipped right through my sword. There was no way to defend it at all, and the lack of blood and slash wounds on my skin proved it.

Plus, if what the Great Sage then told me was right, I would lose my life in three more strikes. My body wouldn’t die; my spirit would. Unbelievable. I didn’t know if this was a skill or some effect of that magic sword, but if anyone underestimated their foe here, it was me. I knew Hinata had to have a unique skill or two, but as of right now, she didn’t even need to show them off to overwhelm me.

Without knowing any of her skills, and with mine sealed away, I was at more of a disadvantage than I ever imagined. Trying to run would’ve been the correct answer here, although that was a gamble in itself.

All my initiative was gone. I had been trying for a while, but Dark Flame and Dark Thunder still weren’t working. Neither was Universal Shapeshift, not without magicules to drive it. Simply maintaining my current body was enough of an ordeal, and with Hellflare similarly offline, I had no ace in the hole to rely on.

But I wasn’t helpless.

“Hmm… Trying to buy time, then? Don’t bother. You are cornered. This Holy Field prevents monsters ranked below A from even taking action. It is the ultimate anti-monster barrier—the pride of the Western Holy Church.”

Not only did she see through my plan; she dropped quite a bombshell. This Holy Field was affecting me, making my body weak and my spirit weaker. If it was slowing me down this much, it’d probably kill any monster who didn’t merit a C rank. My hobgoblins would hardly be able to move and would become ripe for being mown down. The realization upset me even more.

“Do you understand? All magicules inside this barrier have been purified. Even higher-level monsters like you find most of their energy taken up simply by continuing to exist. Your latent powers have left you.”

I didn’t need Hinata to spell it out. Experiencing this for myself, I could tell right off how dangerous a barrier this was. If I had to guess, it was crafted to hunt down monsters ranked A or higher—the so-called hazard class. A sort of ultimate weapon for these monster-reviling Crusaders. Simply deploying it made conditions ripe for victory—and I was sure Hinata thought victory was hers. Now she was egging me on, trying to make me panic. Even trying to speak with her could be lethal by now—no way she’d let me buy any time with conversation.

“I suppose you were unhappy I approached you solo, but normally, I wouldn’t even need to show up for jobs like these. There is one reason, and one reason alone, why the captain of the paladin corps is personally handling this—”

I kept my distance from Hinata. Trying to gauge that rapier’s range was a dangerous game—and the moment I thought that, I felt a pain on my left leg. She got another strike in. Two left.

“—and that’s because I heard you killed Miss Shizu. I told you, I want revenge. Revenge, with your death, by my own hand.”

“Revenge? I mean, all right, I did sort of kill her in a way, but that was—”

“In a way? It doesn’t matter. The end result is the same. She was the only woman who showed me a shred of kindness in this world, and now she’s gone… I don’t really understand this feeling myself…”

Her voice fell to a whisper as she looked at me. Her eyes were emotionless; she saw me as unworthy of even being her prey. She just stood there, showing how little I troubled her.

Hinata had come because she was absolutely confident she could kill me. That confidence didn’t stem from the barrier. Was it from her own skill, which I still hadn’t plumbed the depths of? Maybe Hinata alone was overkill, even. She was treating me like a total wimp, but I had nothing to counter with. Inside this barrier, my chances at victory were close to nil. If I didn’t step up and do something, I was sure to lose.

But who told this woman Shizu was dead? Someone had turned me into the villain of this story. But I couldn’t worry about that. My heart went out to the residents of Tempest.

“You worry about your friends? I’m sure you do. If you idle for too long here, you won’t have any home to return to, will you? Not that I intend to let you.”

If they use a barrier like this to attack, we’ll be wiped out. I had no time to waste dealing with this woman—but she was huge trouble. Major trouble, and the only skills I could count on were those that didn’t rely on magicules. Either my sword moves or my own unique skills. Hinata had me beat with her rapier. Even without the damper on my physical abilities, I could tell from the moment we crossed blades that she wasn’t giving her full effort yet. It was hardly believable to me, but only Hakuro had this sheer, overpowering force.

So that left unique skills. My secret ones. I hesitated to use them, but ah well. I used Battlewill to improve my physical skills, launching Steel Strength and Strengthen Body alongside it. Just as I thought, skills or magic that activated my own internal magicules were still available to me.

“I think it’s a little early to start boasting about that!”

Holding my katana straight forward, I struck down hard with a renewed force. Through my training with Hakuro, I had gained some fairly decent sword skills for myself. If she had assumed this battle was already hers, then maybe this strike would—

Hinata, perhaps surprised by this, immediately took a defensive stance. Or maybe just cautious. And there were those eyes. Those freezing, mathematician’s eyes, devoting themselves to pondering over some logical proof.

There was no surprise there; no indication her guard was down. There was also no pride; just a dispassionate woman doing her work. She observed my movements, coldly searching for a weak spot. Her words were driven by the predictions she had calculated for herself. It must’ve been obvious to her that she didn’t need to be here.

She hadn’t underestimated me. She was still observing my movements, predicting how I would act next, calculating my increased speed, and replying with suitable speed of her own.

It was like fighting against my own Great Sage…

The moment my powered-up katana strike was deflected by her rapier, it made me fully understand where this overwhelming difference in power came from. My sword strike, its edge traveling at nearly the speed of sound, was softly, lightly deflected, and it didn’t damage her own blade at all. She had perfectly read my katana’s path, speed, and force. Only someone at Hakuro’s level could pull off a feat like that.

Then, as I went off-balance, she added a return blow of her own.

“It’s over. I’m impressed you can move that well inside this barrier. To be honest, I underestimated you. But you know, you can’t beat me.”

“Because it’ll take one more blow to kill me?”

“Oh, you know that? This sword is infused with a special ability known as Dead End Rainbow. On the seventh strike, it is guaranteed to leave its opponent dead—even if they only exist in spiritual form. You put in a noble effort, but haven’t you had enough yet?”

I had thought I could manage something here, even without my skills. But my opponent was just too much. An opponent with no weak point, no pride, and who always used the best move possible to bring her to victory. With the ability to observe and analyze everything about me. Even though she was absolutely sure of victory, she never stopped analyzing.



There was nothing I could do. I had nothing to take advantage of. I really didn’t think victory would be so hopeless.

“No,” I replied, “I’ll keep on struggling. I’m not enough of a sucker to just lie back and die, thanks!”

So I tested out everything I could. Recognizing my opponent was above me, I reached out for anything I was capable of. If magicules weren’t around, how about spirit magic? That worked on a different type of energy; maybe the Holy Field wouldn’t affect it. I couldn’t summon elementals, not if I’m separated from the outside world. But I did have a certain deviant spirit inside me.

Report. Using the unique skill Deviant, the higher-level elemental Ifrit has been separated into a pure elemental.

Ifrit, transformed into a half monster, returned to full spirit form.

I could use him to harness elemental magic, but I doubted it would work. Besides, a little ruse like that wouldn’t save me. I needed something huge, something that’d throw my opponent for a total loop.

“O Ifrit, greatest of elementals, defeat my enemy!!”

Then I released him.

The force of the elemental, going far above A rank, was tremendous, containing a massive amount of heat force. Elementals had to run on the magical force of the summoner, but Ifrit and I had a channel of magic running between us, so that was no problem. My energy converted itself into elemental force, flowing freely into the spirit.

Ifrit began attacking Hinata. She probably assumed this was my last trump card. But—Ifrit was just a plant. My real aim—my winning move—was elsewhere.

Fully preoccupied with fighting off Ifrit, Hinata could no longer fully focus upon me. I could be killed in a single stab. Ifrit was far greater of a threat, and he took priority. Exactly the situation I hoped to make.

Leaping behind her back, I attempted to land an enhanced strike, as punishing as I could possibly make it. But as I did—

“You can harness a high-level elemental while isolated from the outside. I didn’t expect that. But that still isn’t enough to compete against me.”

Whipping around, Hinata turned her sword toward me, completely ignoring Ifrit. He stopped. Not being a monster, the Holy Field didn’t bother him at all—and yet, reality could be cruel.

Before my eyes, Ifrit was curled up into a ball, grabbing his head…as if struggling under the command of two diametrically opposed orders.

“What did you do?”

“I’ll tell you, if you’ll tell me what you were just trying to do.”

As if. That’s one of the last cards in my hand.

“Come back, Ifrit!”

Upon my words, Ifrit disappeared back inside me. I immediately launched Analyze and Assess to figure out what happened.

Understood. Ifrit appears to have fallen under the effects of Force Takeover. It is believed that the magic channel connecting you prevented the takeover from succeeding.

Force Takeover?! Does it let her seize other people’s skills, or…?! Was that her unique skill? This otherworlder, Hinata Sakaguchi, was more of a monster than I had ever guessed…

Apparently, I had the wrong idea all along. My attention was focused on the barrier, the thing I assumed was her ace in the hole. I thought that was what made this battle so tough. But I was wrong. That was just a prop to distract my attention.

Looking at Hinata, I saw an affectionate smile on her face. She was one scary lady, let me tell you. She must’ve been totally sure of victory, barrier or not.

“…Did you try to take Ifrit from me?”

“I’m shocked. How did you know that? But if you noticed it, I might as well tell you—you’re right. I tried, using my Usurper unique skill.”

Usurper? You can use that to seize servant demons and spirits? Or skills themselves, even?! Sounds a lot like Glutton, then. Talk about the ultimate battle skill. And no wonder nations treated otherworlders as so special, just like Yuuki mentioned. If you’re fighting an otherworlder, you have to assume they’ve got some kind of unique on hand. The way they decide to use it serves as the key to the entire duel.

If I had relied too much on my own force without realizing what my opponent was packing, the results would have absolutely been my fault. Now I saw why Hinata never took pride in herself, constantly observing and analyzing me. It was like a textbook model battle. I could see what the difference in fighting experience in this world had done for her.

I couldn’t say exactly how superior her unique skill was, but the difference in sheer power between its wielder and me was blatantly obvious.

I needed to resolve myself to this. If I wasn’t prepared to die, I’d never win. But one more strike, and I was dead. I thought I could use Ultraspeed Regeneration to heal most damage—that was a tactical error.

Ifrit, my final weapon, was easily defeated. That just left one more thing to work with. I was hoping I could catch Hinata in a surprise attack, without killing her, but there was no hope for that now.

I didn’t know what unleashing this at full force would do. I might not even live long enough to see the results. But I had to do it.

“Hinata… Shizu asked me to look after you, but I don’t have time for that. I apologize, but I can’t go easy on you anymore. I’m gonna decide this with my next move.”

“Hee-hee! Are you telling me you still haven’t given your all yet? Well, all right. I’ll give you some of my all, too, so I hope you’re ready. This blow is going to make the pain you’ve felt before seem like child’s play.”

We exchanged glances. Then we went on the attack.

“Die! Dead End Rainbow!!”

“Awaken, Glutton!!”

Understood. Order accepted. Executing at once.

Just as I gave the order, I felt my consciousness sink into darkness—before losing it entirely, as if drifting off to sleep.



