

## **M. in Hell 181**

Chapter 181 - Summit (2)

A large-scale world summit had been organized to discuss how to eradicate the Demon Cult—the group led by the ruler of all evil, Satan. It was the first time such a large-scale conference had been held since the Day of Calamity.

A world summit for every functioning country that was still able to call itself a 'country' was being prepared in the US. Among those countries were Eastern Asian countries such as China, Korea, and Japan as well as European countries, Russia, and, of course, the US.

People thought that the conference was being led by the US, but in reality, that wasn't the case. It was actually being led by Guardians, the international organization of Protectors chosen by Gaia.

The members of Guardians were as strong as World Rankers or, in some cases, even stronger. Their power was equal to that of several countries combined. They were an organization that could be called the last hope of humanity.

The world was gathering around them.

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"Ah, Kang-Woo. Your tie is crooked," Han Seol-Ah said.

She reached toward Oh Kang-Woo's necktie. Kang-Woo, who had never worn a tie, let her fix it for him.

"Thanks," he replied.

"Fufu. You look much cooler dressed like this."

"Tsk. I probably look like a squid compared to Si-Hun."

"What are you saying? That's not true," Seol-Ah disagreed as she gazed at Kang-Woo, who was all suited up.

Kang-Woo certainly wasn't as handsome as Kim Si-Hun, but he was fairly good-looking as well. Moreover, he pretty much had the muscular body of a swimmer, so the suit fit him incredibly well. The addition of his piercing eyes to that combination made him look like the heir of a big conglomerate that appeared in dramas.

"Kang-Woo, these clothes are uncomfortable," Echidna said while frowning and pulling on her clothes.

Both Echidna and Seol-Ah were wearing party dresses. The dresses looked excessively fancy, but the two of them were so pretty that the dresses didn't seem like overkill at all.

Slam.

Cha Yeon-Joo swung open the door and entered.

"Hey! Are you ready yet?" she asked.

"Yeah."

Yeon-Joo was wearing a red dress that matched the color of her hair.

"For God's sake, what a bother. Why are they hosting a banquet?" Yeon-Joo whined with a scowl.

Like Echidna, Yeon-Joo seemed to find the party dress that she wore uncomfortable.

A banquet had been scheduled for the night before the summit so that chief executives of each country could strengthen their bonds. Yeon-Joo could be considered one of Korea's chief executives, so she had to participate as well.

"Well, to be honest, this could be more important than the summit itself," Kang-Woo remarked.

Unlike what they expected, the chief executives had accepted invitations to the summit with surprisingly little persuasion. Not even Gaia and Kang-Woo had expected things to go that easily. Still, it would be hard to expect their unconditional cooperation in stopping the Demon Cult.

'I should make as many connections as possible,' Kang-Woo thought.

It was very important for them to build good relationships with the chief executives of each country. After all, it was hard to expect unconditional cooperation from someone just by being acquaintances. Nevertheless, it was good to make at least some sort of connection.

"Oh, right. Kang-Woo, you're probably going to be swamped at the banquet," Yeon-Joo commented.

"Me? Why?"

"It seems that quite a few people are waiting for you," Yeon-Joo explained with a smirk.

Kang-Woo frowned.

'Why?'

The fact that he used to be the Demon King, how he'd been born in the darkness but had accepted the light and was reborn as Tirion's apostle, and how he was the most powerful member of Guardians... Kang-Woo had made sure no one except the members of Guardians knew about all those things.

Moreover, he'd made Si-Hun take the credit for his achievements by spreading false information that Si-Hun was the one who had done all of those things. That's why only members of Guardians or those who knew him personally knew about the Warrior of Light, Oh Kang-Woo.

As a result, most of the chief executives around the world who had superficial knowledge of Guardians were more interested in Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun.

'I specifically set things up that way.'

The hero who had saved Korea, the new sword supernova, the disciple of Sword Emperor Tian Wuchen... Kang-Woo had placed many titles on Si-Hun to boost his popularity.

So, Kang-Woo couldn't understand why people were waiting for him.

"More precisely, they're waiting for you because you're Si-Hun's hyung."

"Ah."

"I guess you weren't able to hide the relationship between the two of you," Yeon-Joo pointed out with a light laugh.

Kang-Woo nodded, finally understanding the reason why.

"I see, so it was because of that."

"Well, it's not a bad thing, is it?"

"I guess not."

To build a relationship with the chief executives, Kang-Woo needed to have a corresponding level of reputation and authority. Rather than just being Member B of Guardians, it was better to be the sworn brother of Kim Si-Hun, the hero who was receiving the world's attention.

'This is better.'

Kim Si-Hun didn't seem talented in terms of building good relationships with politicians, so Kang-Woo could do it in his place.

Step, step.

Kang-Woo's group headed out and met Si-Hun, Gaia, and Grace McCubbin on the way to the banquet hall. They entered it together.

"Wow!"

"So, they are the rumored..."

As the members of Guardians showed themselves, the banquet hall filled with chatter.

The members who got the most attention were Gaia and Si-Hun. Famous politicians and Players from all around the world walked toward them to strike up conversations. Gaia and Si-Hun seemed surprised.

People also walked toward Ito Shinji, Zhuge Xian, Grace, and other Guardians members.

'I guess Guardians really is famous.'

Kang-Woo looked at that scene from a distance.

Guardians, the most powerful group of humanity, only had ten or so people. In the past, before Players appeared, no one would have cared so much about a small organization.

'But...'

Times had changed. Guardians was so powerful that they could erase a country without leaving any trace behind if they wanted.

World Rankers received VIP treatment in the countries that they were based in, and in the case of Wuchen, he pretty much had the Chinese government wrapped around his fingers. It was not a strange sight at all.

'But...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'Something a bit weird.'

He hadn't expected all the countries to cooperate in hunting down the Demon Cult. He had even prepared a trump card for if he couldn't get through to them with words.

Nevertheless...

'They seem too carefree.'

The politicians and Players acted as if they weren't aware of the reason behind the summit. No matter how optimistic and peace-loving they were, their behavior was far too strange considering the Demon Cult was still a real threat.

"Ah, nice to meet you. I am the ambassador of France, Emmanuel Amon."

"You are the sworn brother of Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun, correct? I've heard a lot about you."

Before Kang-Woo could resolve his doubts, the politicians roaming around started to approach him as well.

Kang-Woo smiled and bowed in greeting. "Thank you very much for coming all this way for world peace."

His smile was perfectly professional.

"Hahaha! Not at all. This is all to support Guardians, after all."

"It is a given for any country to support Guardians as much as possible."

'What's with them?'

Kang-Woo furrowed his brows ever so slightly.

Politicians from France, England, Italy, the US, and even Korea gathered and spoke to Kang-Woo.

'Why are they so assertive?'

Unlike Gaia's expectations, the politicians were acting as if they were willing to give them literally everything they needed. It was the night before the summit, but this was too much.

Politicians would usually try to profit as much as possible while offering as little support as possible, but that could not be seen at all. Each offered the best conditions they could possibly offer as if they had come to an auction to buy a product.

"We were thinking of supporting Guardians by offering the services of the France Special Forces."

"We can promise you a budget of a hundred million dollars each year."

"Haha, I feel reassured hearing such things from all of you," Kang-Woo said.

He kept up his professional smile while speaking to several people at once.

'Oh, fuck.'

As the conversations continued, he eventually understood what was going on.

"I heard that the Demon Cultists had suffered great losses in South America."

"Haha! It seems like they can't do much else than hide well."

'These motherfuckers.'

There was no hint of anxiety or fear in the politicians' words. It didn't take Kang-woo long to understand why they could talk like that.

'After all the work we did to stop them, you think hiding is all they're good at?'

The incidents in Korea, China, and then South America... All those incidents that the Demon Cult had caused had been solved more easily than the politicians had expected.

Civilian losses had only happened in Korea. Then in China, they had achieved a massive victory against weak demonic beasts. Lastly, the South America incident had been resolved by the members of Guardians and World Rankers before the Demon Cult even had a chance to do anything.

So, from the politicians' point of view, the Demon Cult just looked like a group of lunatics. The Demon Cult was not even a national threat in their eyes, let alone an international one.

'Shit.'

Kang-Woo frowned.

He had dealt with the Demon Cult's plans so perfectly that it had ended up working against him.

'This isn't good.'

He couldn't see any anxiety at all in the politicians' expressions as they laughed.

At this rate, even if they provided support to Guardians, Kang-Woo was sure that they would take their sweet time to do so.

'This...'

A conflict had arisen. He narrowed his eyes as his mind whirled.

"Ah! Madam Julia!"

"You're here! We've been waiting for you! This is Mr. Oh Kang-Woo, the person that we mentioned before!"

Everyone around Kang-Woo turned their heads to look in a certain direction. Kang-Woo followed suit.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Julia Vilkova, the ambassador of Russia," a shockingly beautiful woman greeted Kang-Woo.

She had long, braided brown hair, red lips, and a perfect figure that was wrapped in a dress with a deep V-neck. A pleasant fragrance wafted over from her, accentuating her extremely sensual aura.

'I'd say she's between Tian Suyan and Lilith.'

Tian Suyan was like a little brat who'd just learned what being sexy meant, whereas Lilith was the epitome of sexiness. Julia Vilkova seemed to be right between them.

"It's nice to meet you too," Kang-Woo greeted in return.

He looked around with a sharp gaze.

'These guys...'

All the politicians and Players who had approached Kang-Woo were now gathered around Julia. Judging by how they were glancing at her, it seemed like they'd approached Kang-Woo because she had told them to.

'This must have been a systematic approach.'

Kang-Woo shook the hand that Julia had extended toward him and smiled.

While smiling seductively at Kang-Woo, Julia continued, "Oh, right. I saw a VIP room in the banquet hall. There's something I would like to speak with you about... Could you give me some time?"

She tilted her head and reached toward Kang-Woo as she moved closer to him. The strange scent that he smelled from her was amplified.

"..."

Kang-Woo's smile disappeared for a second. He narrowed his eyes at the strange scent.

Then Kang-Woo, who seemed to be immersed in his thoughts, smirked. He flexed his fingers into a loose fist as a tingling sensation ran through them.

"Of course," Kang-Woo eventually replied.

He grabbed the hand that Julia had extended toward him.

"In that case, let us all head to the room," Julia told the politicians.

She led Kang-Woo and the politicians to the VIP room.

Click.

"Hah."

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief upon entering the VIP room.

'Come on, aren't you going a bit too far here?'

There were all sorts of delicacies in the VIP room and around thirty beautiful women with faces and figures that did not fall behind Julia in the slightest.

The stunning women approached Kang-Woo as he sat down.

"This is a shark fin dish of the highest quality. Give it a try."

"And this is foie gras and caviar. Give this a try as well."

The thirty beautiful women didn't seem to care at all about the other people who had entered the room with Julia. They surrounded Kang-Woo, cutely offering him the delicacies.

'Damn, you really put out all the stops, huh?'

It was obvious to anyone that they were trying to convince Kang-Woo to join their side.

"I selected these girls myself. I was hoping they would be able to help you get some rest after all the fatigue you've accumulated from the difficult missions you undertook with Guardians," Julia explained, still smiling as she sat down in a chair.

Kang-Woo looked at the girls, delicacies, and politicians surrounding him.

'They don't seem to know me very well.'

Tsk. He clicked his tongue.

A hundred million dollars, which was a sum of money that was hard to even imagine, delicacies he'd never even heard of or seen, and eye-blindingly beautiful women...

"Hahaha."

He couldn't help but laugh in disbelief.

Kang-Woo leaned his back against the couch made of the highest-quality leather and grinned smugly.

'You won't be able to seduce me with trash like this.'

He understood Julia's intentions but found them ridiculous. He wasn't so pathetic that he would lose his way because of things like this.

'You should have prepared kimchi stew at least.'

The tips of Kang-Woo's mouth curled up into a sneer as he mocked their idiocy in his mind.

'I'm not that easy.'

Chapter 182 - Summit (3)

'This'll be easy,' Julia Vilkova thought.

She sneered coldly while looking at Oh Kang-Woo, whose smile deepened when he was surrounded by pretty women.

'And the scent seems to be effective.'

Julia had spread a scent, which had an aphrodisiac mixed in, throughout the room. She'd developed the scent using black magic, and it allowed humans to feel the desire that a demon's body felt. It had such a strong effect that it could make even a devoted religious person or an ascetic monk lose their mind from desire.

The politicians and beautiful girls whom Julia had planned this with had taken a medicine that increased their resistance to the scent. However, Kang-Woo hadn't taken anything like that, so he was fully exposed to the scent's effects.

'I'll start light.'

If Julia were to release the scent all at once, there was a chance that Kang-Woo would feel something was wrong and run out of the room.

"How is the food?" Julie asked.

"Ah, it's very delicious."

"Fufu."

The way Kang-Woo nodded truly made him look stupid.

'Tsk, he doesn't live up to his rumors,' Julia thought, looking at Kang-Woo like he was pathetic.

Kang-Woo was Kim Si-Hun's sworn brother—a man whose talent, abilities, and sense of justice had been acknowledged by Guardians. He'd been allowed to join them despite not having been chosen by Gaia as a Protector.

'I heard he has Gaia's trust.'

Until recently, the person whom Gaia trusted the most was, without a doubt, Grace McCubbin. She was the strongest World Ranker and Gaia's caretaker.

That seemed to have changed of late. Most people knew that Gaia had begun to put more of her trust in Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun and his sworn brother Oh Kang-Woo.

'She doesn't have an eye for people. Maybe it's because she's blind.'

The scene of Kang-Woo gazing lustfully at the women around him was truly a spectacle. Julia even thought that perhaps she didn't need to use the scent.

'Maybe I could've tried to make a move on Sword Dragon directly.'

Her opinion of Si-Hun dropped after seeing his sworn brother acting like this. She regretted having pointlessly taken the long road.

'No, no.'

People thought of Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun as the ace of Guardians as well as the most powerful Protector. There was a rumor that he'd practically resolved the South America incident by himself, so he possessed a very important role in Guardians.

Leaving everything aside, Si-Hun had defeated Balrog, so being cautious was the correct decision for Julia.

'Furthermore, it will be a while before I can ask for Lord Satan's guidance again.'

Satan, the master whom she served and the pinnacle of the Aspects of Evil who led the Demon Cult, had not yet fully revived. Rather, he was preparing for something beyond just a simple revival. So, it was hard for her to have the opportunity to talk with him.

'I must deal with this as thoroughly as possible in the time that I cannot ask for Lord Satan's guidance.'

As an Apostle of Evil, she had to be the one to fill the vacancy left by the Aspects. She couldn't ease up on her plan to break down Guardians from the inside and weaken them.

Julia stared at Kang-Woo. He was grinning like a moron in a drunken stupor, with women in his arms as if he had come to a brothel.

'First, I will make this pathetic man into my puppet.'

There was no need to even think about what Julia would do after that. She would stir up trouble within Guardians by using Si-Hun's trust in Kang-Woo against him.

'I wonder what expression that bitch Gaia will make once that happens.'

Julia smiled wickedly.

She felt a thrill just from imagining the despair that would appear on Gaia's face when the organization known as humanity's last hope, which Gaia's incarnation had painstakingly created, crumbled from the inside...

"Fufu, do you like the girls, Kang-Woo?"

"Ah. Wh-What was I... I apologize."



Upon hearing Julia's words, Kang-Woo returned to his senses and pushed the women away while shaking his head. It seemed like he still had some sanity left.

'But it's only a matter of time,' Julia thought.

She spread more of the scent inside the room. As the scent thickened, Kang-Woo's vision became more blurry.

"Ah..."

"There is no need to apologize. You've been hunting down the Demon Cult without rest lately, haven't you?" Julia asked.

"Th-That's true, but..."

"This is a break worthy of a hero."

"But still..."

'Ugh, you're so damn frustrating. Are you impotent or what?' Julia frowned at Kang-Woo's moronic appearance. 'This is why I hate retainers of gods.'

On the outside, the retainers of gods always acted like good people with a strong sense of justice. Yet, they were so weak in the face of their own desires.

Retainers of gods were truly pathetic to Julia, who had accepted demonic energy, recognized her desires, and pursued them to even greater heights.

'I wonder if you could still act like that after realizing the pleasures that the body of a demon brings?'

The sensation induced by the scent was only an indirect experience, but it wasn't much different from what was felt with a demon's body.

Julia was having fun imagining how this guy, who looked like he had been a virgin for ten millennia, would turn out after feeling such pleasures.

"Should I ask them to leave if you're feeling uncomfortable?" she suggested.

"Ah~ Oppa, don't you like us?"

"But we're so much better than Korean girls~"

The women approached him even more seductively immediately after Julia's.

Kang-Woo's cheeks moved upward in a perverted grin as he replied to Julia, "N-No, it's okay."

His patheticness peaked. Even the politicians around him started to laugh mockingly at him.

"But... didn't you say that you wanted to tell me something?" Kang-Woo asked.

'Oh, I guess he hasn't forgotten about that.'

Julia calmly said, "It wasn't anything important, really. I wanted to talk with you at least once because I admire you."

"Haha, you flatter me."

"Although you weren't chosen as a Protector, you were able to join Guardians because of how much you cared for your sworn brother. That in itself is worthy of admiration."

"You're exaggerating."

"What do you all think?" Julia asked the politicians.

"O-Of course, we were incredibly moved by your story!"

"The older brother who fights on the front lines for the sake of his younger brother! I heard that you aren't even related by blood. Is that true?"

"Ah, yes. It's true."

"I think that you've made an incredible decision."

The politicians around Kang-Woo spoke as if they had been waiting for their turn to chime in. They competed on what their respective countries would do to support him.

'They're all doing quite well.'

Julia smirked upon seeing the politicians jump at Kang-Woo as if they were hungry hyenas attacking their prey.

These politicians weren't directly related to the Demon Cult. They were just people she'd dragged in under the guise of a Russian ambassador.

'Well, I would expect them to be a little useful from time to time.'

Julia wouldn't have put in the effort to drag them in if they weren't of any use. The politicians were there to make Kang-Woo their puppet and use Guardians as part of their respective countries' forces.

She was trying to disband Guardians, so her intentions differed from that of the politicians.

Nevertheless, such details didn't matter. They had the common goal of turning him into a puppet.

Kang-Woo, whose eyes were gleaming while listening to the absurd words of the politicians, said, "Oh, right. You've treated me so well. I feel bad about doing nothing in return."

He took out a bottle of wine from his pocket.

It was quite big compared to his small pocket, so it seemed like he had a magical device of sorts.

"This is..."

"Haha. It's a valuable wine I prepared to drink with my fellow Guardians members after the banquet. But since all of you are so devoted to world peace, I would like to share it with you," Kang-Woo explained.

"Wow."

"You shouldn't have."

"Hahaha! How did you know that I go crazy for wine?"

The politicians praised Kang-Woo.

It wasn't that they were interested in the wine that Kang-Woo had prepared... What they cared about was that he was going to open a bottle of wine that he had prepared to drink with his fellow Guardians members.

'It's working out so easily that it's a bit disheartening,' Julia thought.

She yawned and laid back against the sofa.

Julia had prepared a few more things to use depending on Kang-Woo's reaction, but it seemed like she wouldn't need to use any of them.

'I guess Guardians isn't that big of a deal in the end.'

She couldn't see anyone capable of being a threat to the Demon Cult's takeover. Julia would have to meet Sword Dragon to be completely sure. However, seeing that he trusted someone like Oh Kang-Woo, her expectations had plummeted.

'My lord seems to have overestimated the demon Balrog.'

Satan didn't talk much about what happened in Hell. He'd mentioned nothing at all about the demon king who had fought against the seven princes of Hell for a thousand years or about the demon king's close aides Balrog and Lilith.

It was as if Satan had been traumatized by it all.

'I don't blame him.'

Satan hadn't admitted it, but Julia had heard that Satan and the other princes had lost the war against the demon king.

As for what happened to that demon king...

'He disintegrated while trying to cross the dimensional wall.'

The end of the demon king who had killed the seven princes of Hell had been anticlimactic.

The demon king, who had taken control of the Nine Hells, had tried to get his hands on another dimension, but the result had been devastating. He had charged straight into the system's constraints and gotten annihilated, leaving behind just the source of his power, the Demonic Sea.

'There's no need to worry about someone who has been annihilated.'

Julia needed to focus on the plan.

"All right, let's all have a glass!" Kang-Woo said.

He poured wine for all the politicians who were inside the room.

Julia raised her glass while making a seductive smile.

"To the eradication of the Demon Cult and achieving world peace!"

"Cheers!"

Clink.

They bumped their wine glasses. Then Kang-Woo and the politicians took a sip of the wine.

Julia also took a sip of the wine, which shimmered with a beautiful red light.

'It's good.'

The taste and scent of the wine were so sweet that she would believe it if she were told this was a rare wine.

"Hahaha! It really is a good day," Kang-Woo said excitedly.

His eyes had a hazy look to them as if he was drunk on the scent that filled the room. Even his movements had become sluggish.

"Oh, considering I have you all here, there's something that I would like to tell all of you," Kang-Woo announced.

"Oh, what is it?"

"I'm getting oddly expectant since you're saying it like that."

It seemed like Kang-Woo was about to leak important information about Guardians while in high spirits.

A wide smile appeared on Julia's face.

"You see..." Kang-Woo slurred his words, looking around hesitantly.

He seemed to be conscious of the women who were stuck to him.

Julia waved her hand and ordered, "You girls wait outside. Come back in when I call you back later."

"Yes, ma'am."

The thirty beautiful women walked out of the room

Julia's eyes shone brightly.

'The information seems to be rather important.'

Seeing how Kang-Woo still looked around even though his mind was in tatters, the information he was about to share had to be pretty significant.

"Ahem." Kang-Woo cleared his throat and grabbed everyone's attention. "What I'm about to say cannot leave this room."

"Haha. Of course."

"There isn't anyone more tight-lipped than us."

The politicians quickly agreed to Kang-Woo's condition.

"The truth is..." Kang-Woo began.

Gulp.

The politicians swallowed with anticipation. There was a weird sense of anxiety in the room.

Kang-Woo continued quietly, "There is poison in the wine you all just drank."

"...What?"

"Oh, it's technically not poison, but it's similar. Anyway, if you don't receive an antidote from me in fixed intervals, you will suffer immense pain and die."

"Wh-What do you..."

Chaos ensued.

Shatter.

Julia dropped her wine glass. The blood-red wine wet the carpet.

"What...?" she questioned in a trembling voice. "Wh-What did you just say?"

"I said, you will die under immense pain if you don't get an antidote from me. Is that so hard to understand?"

Kang-Woo laid back against the couch. His eyes still had a hazy look, and he was still moving sluggishly. He looked like he was high, but he spoke with clarity. That didn't make it any easier for them to understand the meaning behind his words though.

Julia glared at Kang-Woo, seemingly questioning the nonsense he was talking about.

"H-Hahaha!"

"You have an amazing sense of humor, Kang-Woo!"

The politicians who had drunk the wine laughed awkwardly while trying to figure out what was happening.

Kang-Woo, who was relaxing on the couch, raised one hand and snapped his fingers.

Snap.

"ARRGGHH!!!"

The French ambassador, Emmanuel Amon, fell to the floor and rolled about in pain. His veins turned black and bulged out, and his skin became pale as a corpse's.

He squirmed in agony and even scratched the floor, ripping his nails out in the process. Foam frothed at his mouth, and he soiled his pants.

"Bleeeeh!!!" Emanuel vomited.

His eyes were bloodshot. He scratched his face, splitting his skin open. Dark red blood spewed out of it.

Snap.

Kang-Woo snapped his fingers again.

Emanuel, who had been struggling in pain, trembled while panting heavily.

He uttered, "Wh-What just—"

"I activated the poison inside of you. If you don't take the medicine I give you once a week, you will struggle immensely just as everyone has seen. Then you will die."

"..."

A heavy silence fell over the room. The politicians looked around with confused expressions, unable to understand what was going on. The silence was so palpable that even the movements of their eyes could almost be heard.

Finally, a politician got up and stomped on the ground.

"D-Do you have any idea what you've just done?!" he exclaimed.

"Of course, I do. Did you really think I didn't?" Kang-Woo replied.

"This is a crime! An international crime! Is Guardians planning to declare war against the world?!"

"War? Of course not. I just want to resolve this as peacefully as possible," Kang-Woo expressed calmly.

After seeing his relaxed attitude, the politicians stood up in succession.

They screamed with faces red in fury.

"Are you doing this with Gaia's approval?!"

"I am canceling all the support I have promised to Guardians. No! I will make sure you pay for this crime!"

"I cannot believe a member of Guardians would do something like this, considering you call yourselves the last hope of humanity!! Are you insane?!"

"Demon Cult! This man must be a Demon Cultist!!"

The room erupted into chaos.

Kang-Woo tilted his head back while leaning against the couch.

"Haaa," he let out a sigh.

Rumble.

"Huh?"

"Wh-What the..."

The entire room shook.

Kang-Woo pulled his head back down. A powerful bloodlust poured out of him and pressed down on everyone in the room.

"Stop fucking yammering," he commanded.

He frowned and raised his legs, resting them on the table with one placed over the other.

"Just do as I say," Kang-Woo said. He spat on the floor. "If you don't want to, then feel free to die."

Chapter 183 - Summit (4)

"..."

Julia Vilkova bit her lip and glared at Oh Kang-Woo.

"It seems I was wrong about you, Kang-Woo. I thought you were a person with a strong sense of justice who worked harder than anyone else for world peace."

"Don't bullshit me." Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. "If you were trying to seduce me, you should have hidden your intentions a little bit. You blatantly tried to use me, so there's no way I wouldn't notice."

"..."

"You should've done it in moderation. That was just too much."

"It's too bad you misinterpreted my goodwill."

"The only thing bad here is your mind," Kang-Woo mocked.

Julia frowned at the cheap taunt.

'Just how?' she wondered.

Julia knew that she'd left her intentions unconcealed. She could have taken it slow enough for it to be noticed, but she hadn't thought that there was a reason why she needed to do so.

'Why didn't the scent work?'

She bit her lip anxiously.

The scent she'd developed allowed a person to feel the desires of a demon. There was no way a human who did not have the resistance against or any experience with the urges of such desires that demons possessed would be able to resist it. That's why she'd used such a simple strategy.

'If that's the case, then...'

That meant Kang-Woo had endured those desires with sheer mental fortitude.

'That's impossible.'

Julia looked at him in disbelief. She knew best how strong a demon's desires were.

'And he resisted that?'

It was like shaking a drug in front of an addict or putting water in front of a person who had collapsed in the desert and telling them not to drink it. A demon's desires couldn't be resisted so easily.

'Damn.'

Julia's expression crumpled in frustration. She felt that her plan to disband Guardians had been destroyed.

'A guy like this is a member of Guardians?'

It was truly ironic that a person like this was a member of an organization that fought for world peace in the name of justice.

Julia clenched her hands into fists.

She considered using demonic energy to eliminate him, but she was right in the middle of enemy territory. The moment she used demonic energy, she would be surrounded by the members of Guardians and ultimately die in vain.

'What should I do?'

Her thoughts became cloudy.

Wham!

At that moment, one of the politicians kicked the table aggressively. It seemed like he had been a Player before becoming a politician. The table was split with just that one kick.

He glared at Kang-Woo and cursed, "Son of a bitch!"

The politician threw a punch filled with blue mana at Kang-Woo.

Grab.

"Huh?" the politician uttered puzzledly.

Kang-Woo easily caught the politician's fist and smirked.

He questioned, "For God's sake, were you all made in a factory or something? How are you all saying the same shit despite being from different countries and ethnicities?"

"L-Let go of me!!"

"Man, I wasn't planning on going this far, you know? It was fine with me as long as we got the support that we needed. But..."

Crack.

Kang-Woo strengthened his grip and broke the politician's bones with a loud crack.

"A-Arrgghh!!!"

"Think about it," Kang-Woo said in a serious tone.

His scheme, which involved trying to control the politicians by making them drink poisoned wine, was a dangerous play that could've turned the world upside down. Nevertheless, there was a very good reason why he'd done such a thing.

Kang-Woo continued, "If I let you do as you wish even just one time, I'll have to keep lowering myself down to your level every single time afterward. You'll pull all sorts of shit whenever we try to do something. Well, I'm fine with that. After all, I'll be able to play with beautiful women and eat delicious food. But..."

Crack.

"AAGGHH!!!"

"That'd just be a waste of pages. Nameless extras like you would progressively get more lines."

"Wh-What the hell are you talking about?! L-Let go of me, you crazy son of a bitch!! You're supposed to be a member of Guardians?! A protector of world peace?! Don't screw with me! Do you have any idea who you're dealing with?! I'm—"

"See? Who gave a nameless extra like you the right to talk so much?"

Crack!

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!"



"This is how it ends up." Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. "If your line came up in a novel, that'd be over two hundred characters of text. Fifty more lines like that shit, and we'd get an entire chapter."

The politician's hand was badly crushed as if it had been crushed by a press. Kang-Woo let it go, and the politician slumped to the floor while clutching his crushed hand to his chest.

"That's enough of an explanation, right?" Kang-Woo said.

Everyone in the room looked at him in fear.

"...What is it that you want?" Julia asked in a trembling voice.

Kang-Woo grinned.

What he wanted was simple. From the moment they lured him into this room and tried to make him their puppet, they only had two choices...

"You either obey..." he sneered, "...or you die."

\* \* \*

"Umm..." Emmanuel Amon murmured hesitantly. He gulped and read out the contents of the paper, "Then... all forty-seven countries participating in the summit have agreed to give their full support to Guardians."

"..."

"The specifics are as follows: France will send thirty Players, who are members of the special forces Cheval de Napoléon, Italy will offer ten million euros and send seventeen members of their special forces Kaiser, the UK will send five of the Knights of the Round Table and famous chef Gordon Ramsay as the restaurant administrator..."

While wiping the sweat dripping from his forehead, Emmanuel continued, "China will send Mr. Tian Wuchen, Ms. Tian Suyan, and 217 martial artists of the Heavenly Sword Clan. Japan will send Princess Kurosaki Yurie, as well as her security team.

"Korea will send Ms. Cha Yeon-Joo and thirteen members of the Red Rose Guild, the entirety of the Hwarang Corps' Second Squadron, and web novelists Wooden Spoon[1] and JerryM[2] as analysts and strategists."

Emmanuel's speech was a summary of the aid that had been offered. However, there were a total of forty-seven countries involved, so Emmanuel had been talking for five minutes.

There were some differences between each country, but it didn't change the fact that the scale of their support had been far more than what Guardians had expected.

"..."

"H-How did this..."

The mouths of Gaia, Grace McCubbin, and Kim Si-Hun gaped open in surprise.

They hadn't expected to receive such immense support. In the first place, it wasn't easy for a country to offer that much support to an external organization.

The three of them couldn't believe what was going on.

"Everyone..." Gaia teared up, as she felt that a miracle had occurred. "Thank you... very much."

She bit her lip in an attempt to hold back her tears.

All the remaining countries on Earth had joined together, leaving behind things like ideology, ethnicity, and religion. If this wasn't a miracle, what else could it be called?

Gaia's heart trembled, and tears full of emotion flowed down her cheeks.

"Thank you all so very much."

She had even thrown away her original name after becoming Gaia's incarnation. She'd done her best to protect the world from being destroyed by the Demon of Prophecy.

Numerous people had joined her, but even more had turned their backs on her. Those important to her had vanished in succession, but new people entered her life.

She'd lost her eyesight, and the world had become dark. Even her legs had stopped working. She'd felt that the world was far too big.

It was as if she'd been left alone in the middle of the sea. The burden she carried was much too heavy for a single person to shoulder.

Her shoulders trembled, and her tears continued to stream down her face.

"Gaia," Si-Hun called out.

He grabbed Gaia's hands, which looked as if they would break from the slightest touch.

Si-Hun felt that he had to say something to her at this very moment, so he did.

"You are not alone."

"Ah..." Gaia uttered, feeling Si-Hun's warmth through her hands.

To her, his energy was hotter and more reliable than anything else...

Her cheeks felt hot. The words Si-Hun had said kept echoing in her mind.

Particles of light began gathering in the darkness. Some were small, and others were big, but they seemed to be illuminating the darkness in her vision.

"Protector Kim Si-Hun..."

"Haha. This is no time to be crying."

"Ah, y-you're right." Gaia blushed while coughing and raised her head. "Once again, I thank you all for having made such a difficult decision. I will not arrogantly make a promise like guaranteeing the safety of the forces that you have decided to send, but we will make sure that none of their sacrifices will be in vain."

"..."

"The world is still in crisis, monsters still appear inside gates, and the Demon Cult and Satan are trying to destroy the world. But..."

Gaia straightened her back. A dignified yet intimidating energy emanated from the frail and slender girl.

She continued, "Not a single drop of blood that we spill will be in vain."

'Damn, what a great line,' Kang-Woo thought.

"Our drops of blood will become the light that illuminates the darkness."

'Yes! Well said, sister-in-law!!'

"The number of troops or how strong they are do not matter."

'Because you can't quantify the value of human lifefeeeeeeee!!'

"Just as little fireflies gather to illuminate the darkness, we will swim through this pitch-black darkness together."

'My god, I might end up falling for her at this rate as well, Si-Hun!!'

Clap, clap, clap!!

Thunderous applause rang throughout the room.

Kang-Woo smiled when he saw the Gaia and Si-Hun couple holding hands.

'Jeez. Well done, my children.'

Then he turned and looked at the reactions of the other people at the summit. Some were crying and trembling. It wasn't hard to see why they were reacting like that.

'I guess these sons of bitches were moved.'

Weirdly, the ones who were crying the most were the politicians he had poisoned. That was probably just a coincidence though.

'To think they'd offer so much support for world peace...'

They had offered so much support that it might even be a detriment to their respective countries. Kang-Woo couldn't help but be moved by their sacrifice.

"Huuuuuurgh," Emmanuel, the French ambassador, cried, unable to restrain himself anymore. He muttered, "Motherfucker... Absolute scum..."

"Ah," Kang-Woo uttered.

'So, he despises the Demon Cult that much...'

Upon hearing Emmanuel's muttering increase in volume, Kang-Woo stood up and walked toward him.

"Gasp!"

"I didn't know... that you harbored such deep resentment," Kang-Woo said.

"N-No, I—"

"There is no need to worry. The world has gathered as one. If we stick together, we will surely be able to defeat the Demon Cult!"

"Y-Yes! Of course!" Emmanuel quickly nodded.

Kang-Woo gripped Emmanuel's hand tightly.

"Kurgh!" Emmanuel groaned.

"Let us fight as one."

"A-Arrgghh."

"Let the light be with you."

"I-It hurts."

"I am also hurting. However, you must endure the pain. You must not let resentment devour you."

"Kuh..."

More tears flowed down Emmanuel's cheeks.

'Shieet, my words must have moved him,' Kang-Woo thought.

Emmanuel was crying, so it seemed like Kang-Woo had managed to get through to him.

The French ambassador couldn't stop sobbing. He was groaning and squirming in pain. Nevertheless, Kang-Woo believed he had certainly touched Emmanuel's heart.

'After all, I have a talent for touching people's hearts.'

There was no doubt that Emmanuel felt moved.

'Trust me, bro.'

Chapter 184 - Lightning Strikes Twice

"Shit, shit!!" a woman cursed aggressively.

The woman, whose skin was as white as snow, was Julia Vilкова—an apostle who served the Masters of Evil and an executive member of the Demon Cult.

Her beautiful face crumpled into a scowl as she bit her lip.

'He got me.'

She'd prepared a group of politicians to disband Guardians. Yet, those relationships that she'd spent years building had been taken from her in an instant. It was so pathetic that it was not even funny.

"Shit!"

Julia had fallen for a trivial and pathetic scheme. It had been totally unexpected; that man actually gave them a poisoned bottle of wine and manipulated them with an antidote... It was a strategy that a villain in a martial arts novel would use.

'The problem is...'

She clenched her hand into a fist.

It didn't matter if it was an old-fashioned or cliché strategy.

'It's effective.'

That man had threatened them with death... He gave them the fear that they might die after suffering immense pain if they didn't take an antidote within a week.

She didn't think the corrupt politicians she'd chosen would have the mental fortitude to overcome such fear. They would do anything as long as it meant that they could get the antidote.

"Fuuu."

Julia sighed deeply and narrowed her eyes.

'I'll have to create an antidote first.'

For her to be able to continue using the corrupt politicians who had become slaves of Guardians, she would have to create an antidote first.

"And..."

She touched her stomach.

As for the most important reason why she had to create an antidote...

'I drank it as well.'

Julia wasn't sure if the poison the man had used would affect her too. Since accepting demonic energy, her body had become closer to that of a demon rather than a human.

'But still, I can't just do nothing.'

Even if she had the body of a demon, that didn't mean she had become immune to poison.

'I have to go to Tibet.'

The Tibet branch was one of the top five branches of the Demon Cult.

'I'll have to develop an antidote there.'

At the same time, she had to get rid of the poison that was left in her body.

"Fuuu."

She took a deep breath. Her boiling emotions calmed down, and her gaze sank.

"Oh Kang-Woo, huh?"

Oh Kang-Woo was a twisted man who wasn't a good fit for Guardians at all. Julia remembered the way he had looked at her. It gave her the chills.

'He's definitely hiding something.'

With an anxious expression, she walked out of the White House and went to the airport where the private jet that she'd used to get there had already been prepared for her next flight.

'I have to go there for matters regarding the Master of Fire anyway.'

Julia boarded the jet, and it took off toward Tibet. She clenched her hands, which were trembling from an unfamiliar sense of anxiety.

\* \* \*

A little earlier in the White House, where the summit was taking place...

Kang-Woo went out to the balcony for some fresh air, and a woman approached him from behind.

"Is it okay that we let her go?" she asked.

The woman had a pure and elegant appearance, but her sensual expressions and movements could not be concealed.

Kang-Woo stretched as he answered Kurosaki Yurie—no, Lilith, "It's okay. I let her go on purpose." He watched Julia's limousine disappear into the horizon.

Then he turned and entered a room. It was the private room that the American government had prepared for him. The luxurious pieces of furniture made it resemble a palace.

Kang-Woo sat down in a chair made of high-quality leather. Lilith approached and sat down on the armrest, placing her hand on his shoulder.

"How long have you known that she was a Demon Cultist?" she asked.

"From the moment I met her."

"Hmm. But you didn't feel demonic energy from her, did you? I wasn't able to feel it when I checked every single human that attended the banquet."

Lilith extended her left arm, which transformed into a sticky tentacle. The tentacle extended, grabbed a cup of coffee that was out of her hand's reach, and gave it to Kang-Woo.

"The Demon Cultists are capable of hiding their demonic energy inside their heart. Even I can't tell them apart just by looking at them."

"Then, my king, how did you—"

"I told you not to call me that."

"Ah, hohoho. My apologies. How did you find out, Master Kang-Woo?"

Kang-Woo took a sip of coffee and answered, "By scent."

"Scent?"

"She used a scent that forcibly incites your desires."

It was similar to the sensation a human felt when they first accepted demonic energy in their body and transformed into a demon. Although it had been a long time since that had happened to Kang-Woo, he couldn't forget it.

As for why he could remember it so vividly...

'I'm still holding it back.'

The desire for blood and destruction, the nightmarish thirst of the constant need to fulfill one's desires—he was still restraining all of the impulses that he'd gotten with his demon body. He had never stopped holding them back for even a single moment.

"The only ones on Earth who can create the desires of a demon so perfectly are the Demon Cult."

Considering that the Demon Cult had spread worldwide, Kang-Woo had thought of the possibility that they might have already spread their influence internationally to politicians. That was why he wasn't at all bewildered about the Demon Cult taking part in the summit.

'It's actually a good opportunity.'

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that meeting a Demon Cultist at the summit was like winning the lottery.

Kang-Woo looked at the hand he'd used to exchange a handshake with Julia. A drop of black blood dripped from his right index finger.

He was about to take a tissue and clean it when...

"Ah, let me clean that for you."

Lilith grabbed Kang-Woo's hand, licking her lips as if she were a predator aiming for its prey. She licked the blood, and the black drops of blood mixed with Lilith's saliva and disappeared into her mouth.

A tickling sensation stimulated Kang-Woo's finger.

"...Aren't you going to ask me why I'm bleeding?"

"Fufu. I can more or less guess why."

Kang-Woo smirked at Lilith's calm answer. It was nice that Lilith caught on to things like this very quickly.

'If it were Balrog, he would've made a fuss out of it.'

He thought of Balrog, whom he didn't dare bring with him to the USA.

"Right. How should I manage the humans that have ingested the poison?" Lilith asked.

"Oh, you don't need to do that."

"You don't need to look over them?" Lilith tilted her head. Then she uttered in understanding, "Ah. I see. Fufufu. Yes, I guess not."

A wide smile appeared on Lilith's face. She extended her hand and stroked Kang-Woo's cheek.

"That human Julia is quite stupid. There is no way something like a beauty trap would work on you, my lord De— I mean, Master Kang-Woo."

"Hmm?"

That wasn't true. After all, when the beautiful women that Julia had prepared tried to seduce him, he had barely been able to hold on to his reason.

Eighteen eyes suddenly appeared on Lilith's face, and the hand that was touching his cheek turned into horrendous green tentacles.

"After all, your body can no longer be satisfied by anyone else but me."

'No.'

"You act as if you don't like it, but your body is honest."

'I fucking said no.'

Kang-Woo pushed Lilith away softly. Disappointed, Lilith stepped back.

"Now that we have gained the cooperation of each country, we should make our preparations," Kang-Woo said as he stood up from the chair.

"Of course." Lilith lifted the hem of the dress and elegantly bent her waist. "May your will be done, my king."

\* \* \*

In the mountains of Tibet, there was a giant Demon Cult branch that the Demon Cult had built inside an entire mountain. It was a branch that thousands of Demon Cultists lived in. The interior was made of such modern facilities that it was hard to believe that a practically pseudo-religious cult resided in it.

Among the countless rooms that were spread out like an ant nest, there was a room that this Demon Cult branch treated as an emergency treatment room. Inside it was an old priest in a black robe standing next to an operating table, on which a woman lay.

The priest slowly opened his mouth and stated, "...There is nothing."

"What?" Julia, the woman lying on the operating table, asked in disbelief while frowning.

The old priest explained, "There are no signs of poison. We've analyzed your body with black magic, regular magic, and even with cutting-edge medical technology, but there are no abnormalities whatsoever with your body, Madam Julia."

"...What?" Julia felt as if she'd been hit in the back of the head. "There's no poison?"

"I also considered the possibility of it being a parasite, so I checked for that as well, but... that was not it either."

"..."

Silence fell over the room. Her mind became foggy, and an inexplicable sense of uneasiness spread through her body.

"W-Wait," she said with a shaking voice.

Memories of the alcohol that Kang-Woo had given her and everything that had happened afterward passed through her mind.

"No way," she muttered.

Kang-Woo had said that he had put poison in the wine and that everyone would die in one week if they didn't receive the antidote.

Moreover, as proof...

"Proof..."

Emmanuel Amon—he'd screamed while struggling in pain. However, he had been the only one.

Furthermore, Emmanuel wasn't even a Player; he was a normal human being. Ordinary humans were so weak that a high-level Player could cause them to have a seizure just by applying pressure on them with mana.

Aside from that demonstration with Emmanuel, there was no proof that Kang-Woo had put poison in the wine.

"But... why?" Julia murmured uneasily.



She became even more confused.

Moreover, the lie about the poison wasn't the only thing she couldn't understand. Julia had believed Kang-Woo far too easily. Why had she trusted his words without any suspicion?

She replayed the events of that night in her mind.

'I don't know.'

However, she still couldn't figure out why.

Had it been because of his overly confident attitude or his eyes, which were full of certainty? Perhaps it was the cliché of putting poison in wine?

She thought of many possibilities but couldn't find an answer.

Julia frowned and raised her right hand to place on her forehead.

"...Huh?"

At that moment, she noticed something on her hand.

It was a black liquid.

"What's this?"

She frowned and took a closer look at the black liquid.

Sniff.

She sniffed it. It smelled a bit metallic.

"Blood...?"

Julia tilted her head confusedly.

\* \* \*

"Prepare... for war?" Gaia asked with a bewildered expression after hearing Kang-Woo's words.

Kang-Woo nodded. "Yes. Now that we've been promised support from all countries, it's about time we prepare to engage in war against the Demon Cult."

"B-But...!" Gaia made a flustered expression. "We... still don't know where they are."

"I've found one," Kang-Woo said with a smile. "The Chinese branch is located in the mountainous area of Tibet."

Chapter 185 - Crocodile Tears

[A summit between 47 countries took place, the biggest one since the Day of Calamity.]

[The Earth has united under one banner.]

[Unexpected results... Rather than choosing to benefit their own countries, politicians have chosen world peace.]

[Countries have formed an alliance under the US... The name of the world alliance has been announced to be Guardians.]

The news shook the world. An alliance of such a magnitude hadn't even been formed on the Day of Calamity, when half of the world had been massacred at the claws of monsters. Guardians, the alliance that had been made through the active support of each country, had completed its grand launch.

Although it was called a world alliance, it was not made up of every army and Player in the world. They did not share an economic, political, or religious system either. If a comparison were to be made, it was as if an international super-guild had been born.

Ever since the Day of Calamity, the norm for armies all over the world had changed from being a massive force of regular soldiers to small elite forces of powerful Players. So, the birth of this unusual super-guild had been referred to with the overblown term of 'world alliance.'

The officially announced leader of Guardians was Grace McCubbin. Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun had been announced as her right hand.

There was quite a commotion about the announcement regarding Sword Dragon. He was a rising star, but his abilities had not been evaluated like the established World Rankers—Tian Wuchen, Mahabach, Jason, Emilia, and so on.

One of the US rankers, Jason, had been dissatisfied with the announcement and challenged Kim Si-Hun to a duel.

However...

Poster (Tresha): Did you guys hear the news??? Sword Dragon apparently beat the shit out of Jason!!

↳ I honestly didn't even watch the stream since I thought Sword Dragon would lose, but fr?? How did he win?

↳ The Pacer: I saw it. Jason got absolutely floored.

↳ Butterfly Valley: According to the rumors, not even Tian Wuchen is a match for him.

↳ Wooden Spoon: bruh LMAO not even a year has passed since Tian Wuchen accepted Sword Dragon as his disciple, right? What an absolute unit LOL

The battle between Si-Hun and Jason had been streamed worldwide. Si-Hun had absolutely destroyed Jason by an overwhelming margin.

The communities were in an obvious uproar at the unexpected development of events. Si-Hun's name became almost as famous as Grace's and spread worldwide.

Everything went smoothly after that. Players from all over the world were gathered under the name Guardians. They were designated into squadrons depending on their Traits and specialties before starting group training.

Guardians, the organization that had been hiding behind masks and protecting the world in secret, had formally presented themselves to the world.

\* \* \*

"A-Amazing. The news channels are full of news reports about Guardians and Si-Hun," Han Seol-Ah said in surprise while changing channels.

She'd been in a party with Si-Hun since his early days as a Player, so seeing him become famous worldwide felt unreal.

"It feels like Si-Hun has gotten far away," she remarked.

"Seol-Ah, you're a part of Guardians now too," Oh Kang-Woo pointed out.

"Ah, y-you're right."

Guardians had moved away from being a secret organization formed only of Protectors after going public. They were now rapidly growing in size. A secret organization that protected the world sounded cool, but having more members expanded the limits of what they could accomplish.

'It's pretty much pointless for Guardians to remain a secret organization at this point.'

If a secret organization were to be successful, then its target—which, in Guardians' case, was the Demon Cult—had to be unaware of its existence. That way, they would be able to ambush the target in secret or take other action in stealth.

'But we can't do that anymore.'

The Demon Cult already knew about Guardians. Even a small branch of fifty people had recognized Guardians, so there was no question about other branches.

In such a scenario, keeping Guardians as a secret organization was dumb. The correct thing was to announce their name publicly and move forward.

"They always talk about the same thing. I wish they would stop airing this," Echidna, who was sitting on Kang-Woo's lap, said while pouting.

Kang-Woo smiled and patted her head.

"Why?" he asked.

"The Re:Zero rerun was canceled because of that. It was the last episode..." Echidna complained, kicking her feet.

'Is that an anime she likes?' Kang-Woo wondered.

In between her dragon-tongue magic training sessions, Echidna often spent her spare time watching television, and what she liked the most was anime.

Seeing her stare at the television with bright eyes was one of the small things Kang-Woo liked to do.

'I should get rid of them as soon as possible.'

Kang-Woo's goal was to spend the days relaxing and watching television. Yet, as time went on, those days seemed to be getting farther and farther away from him.

'Ancient demonic beasts, the princes of Hell, the celestial realm...'

Even the divine realm where Gaia and Tirion resided was getting involved.

'At this rate, maybe we'll get a martial arts world too.'

The entire world was becoming a shitshow now that Gaia's protection, which had been keeping the dimensional wall intact, was almost gone.

Kang-Woo felt like he wouldn't even be surprised anymore if he were to find out there were even more worlds. The peaceful life that he desired so much was getting further away the more dimensions got added into the mix.

"Urgh."

He shook his head.

It was pointless to think about things he couldn't resolve. His priority was to deal with what was in front of him first.

"Gaia, you don't look too good... Is something bothering you?" Seol-Ah concernedly asked Gaia, who was sitting on the couch too.

"I-It's nothing," Gaia answered, shaking her head flusteredly.

Kang-Woo glanced at Gaia, who couldn't seem to calm down.

'It must be awkward for her.'

Gaia had begun living in Kang-Woo's house after Guardians' inauguration ceremony. Grace, the one who used to take care of her, had become busier, so Gaia needed someone else to take care of her.

They'd decided to use Grace as Guardians' representative because Gaia was too important. However, she had to be taken care of by someone they could trust, and that's why she was living with Kang-Woo.

"Grace and Si-Hun are beyond busy, so I'm not sure if it's okay for me to stay here doing nothing," Gaia expressed.

"It's okay. It's not like they're working for our comfort," Kang-Woo replied.

After Guardians went public, they'd deliberately hidden Kang-Woo's and Gaia's existences. Kang-Woo was Guardians' strongest member, so they wanted this trump card hidden from their enemies. Gaia, on the other hand, was their fatal weakness, so they needed to hide her to protect her.

They were in hiding for different reasons, but it didn't change the fact that they both didn't have much to do at the moment compared to the other members of Guardians.

"Kang-Woo, have you investigated the Demon Cult branch in Tibet?"

"Yes. I went there a few days ago. As expected, it was massive."

There was a risk of being discovered if Kang-Woo were to search in greater detail, so Kang-Woo had only gotten a general outline of the branch's structure with the Authority of the Beholder. Nevertheless, he managed to discover that the branch was on a whole other level compared to the branch in the Middle East.

Over five thousand Demon Cultists lived within the repurposed mountain interior. There were also numerous demons residing there, which meant the number of inhabitants was even larger than that. It was the biggest base they'd ever found.

"...It really might become a war," Gaia remarked.

"Yes," Kang-Woo agreed with a nod.

Wars involving millions of soldiers like in the past no longer existed. They were centered instead around a small number of superhumans known as Players, so five thousand Demon Cultists wasn't a number that could be taken lightly.

"Kang-Woo... you won't participate this time, right?"

"I will be participating, but I won't be in the forefront," he said in a firm voice.

Gaia's expression darkened.

Kang-Woo asserted, "It's a necessary thing."

He wasn't going to compromise on that.

If Kang-Woo, Balrog, and Lilith were to fight in the war, winning it would be far easier. In fact, unless there was a prince of Hell, just the three of them would be able to wipe out the Demon Cult branch.

Nevertheless...

'I can't fight alone forever.'

Of course, Kang-Woo would have to step up if a prince of Hell, a being that couldn't be defeated with numbers, were to personally participate in the war. Even so, Kang-Woo couldn't be in every single fight. It would be egocentric to think that he could do everything alone.

'And...'

He recalled what the politicians had said at the banquet hall. They had not felt a shred of fear or anxiety regarding the Demon Cult.

That was also the case for the Players who had just joined Guardians. They didn't put much effort into training, and all sorts of incidents kept happening. It was as if they were making it clear that they'd been forced to be there.

They weren't scared of the Demon Cult, so they were just trying to use the name and prestige of Guardians as much as possible. That was the current mindset of the Players. Several Players had even been caught misusing that prestige by accepting bribes.

'We've won too easily so far.'

Kang-Woo was too strong, so they'd been able to overcome dangerous situations too easily. The other Players had not even had the opportunity to experience bloodshed and to feel the need to be vigilant toward the Demon Cult. This issue wasn't something that could be resolved by simply telling them that the Demon Cult was dangerous.

'They need to know.'

At this rate, it was obvious that, with such complacency, the Players would be digging their own graves. They needed to know how powerful and terrifying the Demon Cult and demons were—even if much blood needed to be shed in the process.

"Didn't you feel it too when you were talking to the politicians, Gaia?"

"..."

"Do you really believe it's okay for things to go on like this?"

There was a heavy silence.

Gaia bit her lip and slowly shook her head. "No. I think that it's dangerous."

'What a relief.'

It seemed like she wasn't dumb enough to be unreasonable in a situation like this. Gaia too knew how serious the situation was.

"I didn't make this choice just to raise their vigilance," Kang-Woo continued.

If the goal were only to raise their vigilance, then there would be other options. However, he'd decided to leave this war to the Players for a different reason.

'We need to make our forces stronger.'

The phrase 'What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger' was nonsense in most cases, but that wasn't the case for Players. Players became stronger through battle, especially when their lives were on the line.

It was not simply about them gaining battle experience.

'The level cap and EXP.'

Most Players usually broke past their level cap by hunting strong boss monsters to gain experience points or when they were on the brink of death. The upcoming battle against the demons could satisfy both requirements. Demons gave more experience points and were stronger than boss monsters, so the Players' lives would be at risk.

Basically, Players would be able to obtain huge growth thanks to the war.

'There has to be at least thirty Players who are of the level of World Rankers.'

Kang-Woo thought that was the bare minimum they needed for the future battle against Lucifer. Only World Ranker-level Players would be able to deal significant damage to a prince of Hell.

"You said before that the drops of our blood will become the light that illuminates the darkness, didn't you?" Kang-Woo asked.

"I did," Gaia answered in a heavy voice.

Kang-Woo put his hand on her shoulder, which was trembling slightly.

"This war is a chance to prove that statement."

\* \* \*

"All troops, get ready!!!"

It had been two months since Guardians was made known to the world. Their troops, who had completed basic training, arrived in Tibet. Ten thousand Players had gathered from all around the world. They were the finest of the elites who had completed their Seventh Awakening.

"Advance!" Grace, who was at the forefront, shouted.

The Players weren't riding on horses like cavalry forces in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the scene of so many Players charging forward was quite impressive. The warrior-class Players at the vanguard were running at a speed that made cars look pathetic.

"Hey! Demon Cultist heads are apparently five hundred thousand dollars each!"

"Holy shit. They're paying that much for a bunch of lunatic cultists?!"

There wasn't a hint of anxiety on the faces of the advancing players. They charged recklessly, without even maintaining formation, at the mountain where a branch of the Demon Cult was hiding.

Rumble!!!

There was an explosive bang, and a cloud of white smoke rose. Demonic beasts, demons, and Demon Cultists emerged from the mountain while exuding black demonic energy.

"Shit! H-How did they find this place...?!"

"Stop them!"

[Kahahaha! I was getting bored being stuck inside a mountain all day! Perfect timing!]

[I, Malfurion, demon of the Seventh Hell, will face you!]

The battle between demons and Players began. Screams and sounds of explosions as well as waves of heat and frost spread in all directions.

"It's begun," Gaia, who had been waiting at the rear for the battle to begin, stated.

Kang-Woo nodded.

"Yes, it has," he replied solemnly.

The members of Guardians were fighting desperately with all their might. Seeing them shed their blood made his heart hurt.

'I can't just watch.'

Kang-Woo didn't intend to simply watch as the others fought hard and spilled their blood on the battlefield.

Black smoke emerged from his hands and enveloped the corpses of the demons that had been killed.

Riiing.

[Activating the Trait 'Reaper of Souls.']

[Slightly expanding the passage leading to the deep end.]

"Everyone is fighting," Kang-Woo said in a voice full of sadness while hearing the system's notification. "The blood they shed won't be in vain."

Riiing.

[Activating the Trait 'Reaper of Souls.']

[Slightly expanding the passage leading to the deep end.]

"Guardians will become stronger with that blood."

Riiing.

[Activating the Trait 'Reaper of Souls.']

[Slightly expanding the passage leading to the deep end.]

The tips of Kang-Woo's mouth curved upward.

"Humanity will move a step forward in protecting the world's peace and making a better future."

'Oh, fuck.'

Riiing.

[Activating the Trait 'Reaper of Souls.']

[Slightly expanding the passage leading to the deep end.]

He kept hearing the chime of the system notifications.

'I shouldn't be smiling.'

His heart ached as he watched Guardians' members fight desperately against the demons.

Riiing.

[Activating the Trait 'Reaper of Souls.']

[Slightly expanding the passage leading to the deep end.]

'Man, I really shouldn't be smiling.'

The bloodshed was necessary, but he tensely clenched his hands into fists while watching it happen. It seemed like tears would drop from the eyes of the Warrior of Light, Oh Kang-Woo.

Riiing.

[Activating the Trait 'Reaper of Souls.']

[Slightly expanding the passage leading to the deep end.]

'That's weird. I'm super sad right now.'

The tips of his mouth kept going up uncontrollably, with silent laughs leaking out of it. There was truly nothing more delicious than free food after all.

'Ah, I'm so sad. I can't stop crying.'

Kang-Woo lowered his head while shedding tears as if he couldn't bring himself to watch the battlefield. However, the real reason was to hide his extremely wide smile.

Huehuehuehue.

Chapter 186 - Aspect of Fire (1)

Crack!

Boom!

"Arrgghh!"

"Wh-What the—?!"



The Players' eyes widened.

A giant demon with a massive body that was over five meters tall rushed toward the Players, who were panicking.

"S-Sto—"

Bash!

Before the Player at the front could even finish his words, the giant demon kned him in the chest. The upper body of the warrior-class Player was blown away with just one attack.

[What do you think you are doing on the sacred battlefield?] the demon questioned, frowning in displeasure.

He could tell that these humans were underestimating them, the demons.

The giant demon laughed in disbelief.

'These mere humans... To think that they let down their guard against us demons.'

The humans had behaved like a deer yawning in front of a tiger.

The demon felt insulted. These puny humans were acting like sheep with no shepherd although they wouldn't be able to defeat him even if they charged at him all at once.

[You have offended me.]

That was enough reason to kill them.

The demon took action. Explosions and screams rang out all over the battlefield.

"Wh-What's going on?!"

"W-Were d-demons meant to be this strong?"

This was when fear finally appeared in the Players' eyes.

These demons were completely different from what they'd heard in the news about the Demon Cult in Korea, China, and South America. The weak demons who had been massacred without being able to do anything were nowhere to be seen.

Boom!

A young man covered in blue energy stomped on the ground. He rushed through the battlefield and appeared in front of the demon in the blink of an eye.

The man lowered his posture and slid his left leg back. He then soared into the air while jumping with his right leg.

Slash!

[Kurgh!]

The demon who had been wiping the Players out was split in half.

"S-Sword Dragon."

"Sword Dragon! Sword Dragon is here!"

"W-We're saved!"

The surviving Players cheered.

"All of you," Kim Si-Hun said, turning to face them.

One of the Players said with a grin, "Haha! Man, I guess you didn't win against Jason by sheer luck—kugh! Kuh!"

Si-Hun extended his hand and grabbed the Player by the collar.

He questioned the Player, "What do you think you're doing?"

"Eh..."

Boom!

"What... do you think... you're doing?"

"Kugh! P-Please let me g-go..."

Si-Hun emitted a strong bloodlust as he glared at the Players with a fiery gaze.

"Get the fuck out of here," he told them.

"What?"

"We don't need dumbasses who don't know how to respect a formation. Get the fuck out of here right now."

"..."

Silence fell over the Players after they heard Si-Hun's aggressive words. They gulped and looked at each other nervously.

Unlike the rumors, the demons were extremely strong. These Players were currently in the middle of a battlefield, so there was no way they'd be able to get out in one piece.

"P-Please give us a chance!"

"We didn't think the demons would be this strong!"

"..."

They begged desperately, as if pleading for their lives.

Si-Hun frowned in displeasure.

"Haaa," he sighed.

If it were up to him, he would have left them alone in the middle of the battlefield, but he couldn't do that.

'It's not the time.'

He bit his lip anxiously.

Si-Hun looked around the battlefield. The situation was bad. Most of the Players were in a panic since they hadn't expected the demons and Demon Cultists to be this strong.

"Shit."

He remembered Oh Kang-Woo's words.

'Hyung-nim was right.'

Everything had been solved too smoothly because of Kang-Woo's incredible strength. The humans who had been protected like plants in a greenhouse looked pathetic.

It reminded Si-Hun of... himself.

He remained silent.

He could see himself in the Players who were bewildered by the power of demons.

'Me too.'

Si-Hun looked down at the sword he was holding. His hand was trembling. The fear that he felt was so immense it could swallow him whole.

He recalled the suffocating sensation he'd felt just from looking at the demon in the red demon mask—that scene of the mask floating in the darkness as if the demon had been born as darkness itself.

[Struggle desperately. Struggle while thinking of me.]

That quiet voice of the demon... Just remembering it was enough to throw Si-Hun's mind into chaos.

"At this rate..."

Si-Hun was no different from these Players. He laughed in disbelief at how pathetic he was.

He clenched his hand into a fist, with a thick vein bulging out.

'How long are you going to keep staying on the sidelines like a baby?' he asked himself.

Rumble!!

Si-Hun aggressively stomped on the ground, and blue energy raged, gushing out from his dantian.

"Fight as one!" he yelled, using Qi to amplify his voice.

That yell, which was loud enough to cover the entire battlefield, made all of the Players, demons, and Demon Cultists focus on Si-Hun.

He charged forward and swung his sword down on a giant and hideous demon who seemed like an impossible opponent for the humans.

Slash!

Black blood sprayed out like a fountain. Si-Hun had successfully cut down the demon with one strike.

The Players, who had been in chaos due to the unexpected strength of demons, gazed intensely at Si-Hun.

Si-Hun raised his sword, and blinding blue light shone from him.

He shouted aggressively from the bottom of his soul, "For Guardians!!!"

"Yeaaaaahhhh!!!"

The Players' screams reverberated throughout the battlefield.

\* \* \*

The battle intensified. Demons and Players continued fighting against each other.

Kang-Woo, who was looking at the situation from the rear, turned away while tearing up.

"I was prepared for it, but it certainly is hard to stand by and watch."

"Kang-Woo..." Gaia called out to him worriedly.

Kang-Woo shook his head and turned around.

"I'm going to get some air for a bit," he said.

"Okay."

Kang-Woo walked out of the commander's tent, which was located at the rear of the battlefield.

"Fuck." Kang-Woo shook his head while slapping himself. "I almost laughed."

He knew he had to keep acting serious, but he couldn't help but grin at the constant ping-pong of the message windows.

Kang-Woo also felt refreshed after seeing all the new Guardians members, who hadn't taken the issue more seriously, take a beating.

'I hope they're weeded out through this incident.'

He wasn't sure if making a comparison like this was correct, but the war was, in a sense, doing the job of refining their troops. It was helping them select the Players who, despite feeling fearful of the powerful demons, were able to overcome their fear and fight until the end.

Tap.

Kang-Woo lightly jumped and rose into the air. He flew to the peak of the mountain from where he could get a clearer view of the battlefield.

The four beings whom he could call his direct subordinates were waiting for him there. It was only in front of them that he did not need to act as the Warrior of Light, as they knew the true nature of the demon Oh Kang-Woo.

He walked toward them—Echidna, Vaal Zahak, Balrog, and Lilith.

The one who ran to him first was Echidna.

She grabbed his sleeve and asked, "Where's Seol-Ah?"

"She's in the healer squadron in the rear," Kang-Woo answered.

"Kekeke. My Death Knight is secretly protecting her, so you don't need to worry about her," Vaal Zahak said, stamping the ground with his staff. He laughed creepily. "It is my greatest Death Knight, made with Reynald's corpse. No ordinary demons will be a match for it, even those of the Ninth Hell."

"Good," Kang-Woo replied with a nod.

He then sat down on a rock that gave him a full view of the battlefield.

Echidna's eyes lit up, and she tried to sit on his lap.

"Ngh."

"Fufu. Stay back for a moment, child."

However, Echidna was held back by some tentacles. She struggled to get free, but her opponent was Lilith, an archdemon capable of facing a prince of Hell.

"Let me go," Echidna demanded.

She glared at Lilith, but Lilith merely shrugged and ignored her.

Lilith approached Kang-Woo and asked in a seductive voice, "Master Kang-Woo, would you like me to brew you a cup of coffee?"

"Yes, please."

Soon after, he looked down at the battlefield while holding the cup of coffee that Lilith had given him.

'They're fighting better than I had expected.'

To begin with, the Players weren't weak... and as a collective force, they had quite an immense amount of raw power.

Kang-Woo had been worried after seeing them panic initially. However, the panic had quickly died down thanks to Si-Hun's flashy performance.

'Well done, my boy!'

Kang-Woo wanted to clap because of how proud he was of Si-Hun.

He'd been prepared to see some blood, but he didn't want the humans to be massacred by the demons. It was with Si-Hun's quick thinking that they were able to avoid the worst-case scenario.

"Right, then."

His plan to instill vigilance into the minds of Players had succeeded. He even noticed that a few Players had awakened with a burst of mana during the battle.

It was time for Kang-Woo to make his move.

"Get ready," he said quietly.

Balrog, Lilith, and Vaal Zahak knelt before their king. Echidna glanced at them and quickly followed suit.

"While they are distracted with the battle, ambush the interior of the Demon Cult branch," Kang-Woo ordered.

"What should we do with the humans still inside the base?" Balrog asked.

"Do you even need to ask?"

Kang-Woo smiled.

It was something that wasn't even worth asking. During the ten millennia that he'd spent in Hell, he'd moved according to one simple law...

"Answer to evil with greater evil," he said calmly.

Balrog grinned and finished Kang-Woo's sentence, "Return bloodlust with even greater bloodlust."

Kang-Woo stood up and looked down at the huge Demon Cult branch inside the mountain.

"Wipe them all out."

\* \* \*

Slam!!

Boom!

"ARRGGHH!!"

Screams filled the tunnel. An intense smell of blood and horrifyingly loud noises overwhelmed the senses of those present.

There was a woman running through a tunnel, which was shaking violently as if an earthquake were in motion.

"Huff! Huff!"

She was Julia Vilkova—a very important executive of the Demon Cult who had the position of Apostle of Evil.

Julia managed to escape the crumbling tunnel.

"Shit, shit!!"

Her beautiful face crumpled in exasperation.

The Tibet Temple was one of the five most important branches of the Demon Cult, and it was now on the verge of collapse.

'Since it has come this far...'

She bit her lip anxiously.

The preparations for the next part of the Demon Cult's plan were still incomplete. The consequences would be irreversible if she messed something up by commencing it hastily.

However...

'I have no other choice.'

At this rate, the Tibet branch would be destroyed. There was nothing else she could do.

Slide.

As Julia opened the door leading to the heart of the giant mountain, she was engulfed in an intense wave of heat.

"I must... wake him up."

The Aspect of Fire... the Lord of Inferno...

Julia had to awaken Mammon, the Prince of Greed.

Chapter 187 - Aspect of Fire (2)

A little earlier...

"Intruders?" Julia Vilkova questioned in surprise.

"Y-Yes!" the priest responded urgently.

Julia wore a fierce frown as she raised her hand and cast magic. The branch interior immediately became visible to her like a live stream of CCTV footage.

"Gasp."

Julia's mouth gaped open. She couldn't believe what she was seeing.

'Why is Balrog here?'

She couldn't understand what was going on. It might be possible for humans to ambush them, but why was Balrog there?

'Didn't he get killed by some members of Guardians?'

Julia had thought that Balrog had died at the hands of Guardians' members, yet she was now watching him run wild inside the branch.

Moreover, he wasn't the only one attacking the branch.

'I'm not sure who that kid and the bag of bones are, but...'

The other invaders had a level of power that couldn't be compared to that of an average demon. However, they didn't seem to be part of the group of Guardians members who were attacking the entrance of the branch.

'They're using demonic energy.'

Demons were Guardians' mortal enemies, so there was no way that Guardians would recruit members who could use demonic energy.

More importantly, Balrog and an Undead were among the invaders. So, there was no way the invaders were part of Guardians.

In other words, the three individuals who had infiltrated the branch and the members of Guardians who were currently attacking the entrance of the branch were two different forces.

"Shit! What in the world..."

Julia burst into a rage at the unexpected development of events. She slammed her fist onto the giant table, splitting it in two.

"Call back the forces that were sent outside!" she ordered.

"B-But if we do that, Guardians will—"

"The humans aren't the issue right now! The branch is being attacked on the inside!"

"Y-Yes, ma'am," the priest replied, quickly lowering his head.

A portion of the Demon Cult's forces that were fighting against the Guardians members headed inside instead.

The black-haired child and the skeleton were a problem, but the biggest issue was Balrog.

'It's nowhere near enough,' Julia thought.

They didn't have enough demons to stop that monster Balrog, who was famous even in Hell. Even with the full force of the branch, they would barely be able to stop Balrog. Having to fight off Guardians at the same time was simply absurd.

'I have to request for reinforcements.'

Julia grabbed a crystal orb and contacted the branch nearest to Tibet with the biggest forces.

BOOM!

Crack!

- ARRGGHH! S-Stop him!!

"What the hell...?"

Julia heard explosions and screams through the crystal orb.

"This is the Apostle of Evil Julia Vilkova. The Tibet base has been attacked. Requesting immediate backup."

- B-Backup?! Nonsense! We're also being attacked! a voice screamed desperately.

The Cardinal had responded to Julia disrespectfully despite being of lower rank, which showed just how bad the situation was. Julia had guessed it after hearing the explosions, but it seemed like something serious had happened there too.

"Who are the attackers? Guardians?"

- L-Lucifer! Lucifer's retainers are attacking us!

"What?"

'Guardians, Balrog, and Lucifer...'

Julia looked confused.

'What the hell is...'

Satan had said that Lucifer would send delegates to talk things out first, yet they had suddenly attacked the Demon Cult out of nowhere.

"Did you attack Lucifer's delegates?!"

- Shit, no! We didn't do anything!! They just attacked us out of nowhere!

The Cardinal sounded too desperate for him to be lying.

Julia grabbed her head as if it hurt.

'Has he gone mad?'

She'd heard that Lucifer was being attacked by the celestial realm and couldn't recklessly take action at the moment. If he had come all the way here to attack them, it pretty much meant that he was trying to drag them down and perish with him.

"D-Don't tell me..."



Julia thought of Balrog, a third party in all of this, and Lucifer's retainers, who were currently attacking the other branch. There weren't many conclusions she could reach based on those two facts.

"Balrog must have sided with Lucifer!!"

This conjecture appeared in her mind like a strike of lightning. She couldn't think of any other explanation for the current situation.

'As for why Lucifer is attacking the Demon Cult...'

Lucifer had likely allied himself with Balrog after concluding that he would be able to wipe out the Demon Cult easily with Balrog's cooperation.

"H-Hahahahaha!" Julia laughed.

She then frowned and stomped on the ground.

Boom.

The entire room shook, and a dense wave of demonic energy surged upward.

"How dare they..."

There was only one possible reason why Lucifer would be attacking the Demon Cult despite being under attack from the celestial realm. He was surely aiming for the Demonic Origin that the Demon Cult possessed.

"He dares to attack us?!"

Julia was overcome with rage. Since it had come to this, they could no longer hope for compromise with Lucifer.

'Now, it's war.'

It was time to instill fear into all those who were going against the Demon Cult.

"Fuuu."

Julia got up.

BOOM!

The loud explosions that were shaking the branch were getting closer to her location. The mountain shook so much that it seemed like it would crumble.

"Guh."

Julia had talked as if all of their enemies would regret attacking them, but the situation was not looking good for the Tibet branch. The Demon Cult might have had a chance if this had happened at the headquarters, but the Tibet branch had no way of fending off these enemies.

'No.'

There was a way.

'But...'

She hesitated.

The preparations for the next part of the Demon Cult's plan were still incomplete. The consequences would be irreversible if she messed something up by commencing it hastily.

'I have no other choice.'

Julia quickly made up her mind. She quickly headed somewhere.

Tssss!

"U-Urgh."

Every time she took a step, smoke rose from her skin as if it were burning. She wrapped her skin with all of her demonic energy. It was being consumed at high speed, but it was due to that layer of demonic energy covering her skin that she could resist the heat.

"Oh, Aspect of Fire..."

Julia walked through a tunnel filled with red lava. At the end of it, there was a glowing yellow sphere.

The Prince of Greed, Mammon, was asleep inside that sphere.

"Fuuu."

Julia took a shaky breath and placed her hands on the floor. Demonic energy flowed out of her hands and spread all over the floor, lighting up a magic circle made up of complex geometrical patterns with a black glow.

She chanted, "Zazas, zazas..."

The sweat dripping from her forehead evaporated before it could touch the ground. The horrifyingly intense heat gradually got even hotter.

Rumble—!

"Kuh!"

A red Rift had formed in the air. However, the demonic energy emerging from it rampaged, likely due to the incomplete preparations.

The mountain—no, the entire Tibet branch shook.

'Please.'

It didn't matter to Julia if the land around them was split or if a massive volcano erupted and its lava engulfed the entirety of China. All that mattered to her was whether Mammon would open his eyes.

As long as he awoke, this gamble would be a success.

Crack.

The yellow sphere split open, revealing a three-meter-tall figure. It was a demon so fat that it looked like it would have trouble breathing.

"Aahhh."

The enormous being that should be called a ball of fat rather than a demon waddled out of the sphere.

The demon's appearance was hideous and unsightly, but Julia knew very well who he was.

"Oh, Aspect of Fire," Julia greeted.

[Puhihihi. The hell? Did you forcibly awaken me?]

The lump of fat laughed, but the thick bloodlust he exuded did not match his smile.

"M-My apologies. I know the preparations are incomplete, but we were attacked..."

[That doesn't change the fact that you forcibly awakened me, does it?]

"My apol—kurch!"

A glowing yellow arm sprang out of the ball of fat in the blink of an eye and grabbed Julia's neck.

Sizzle—!

"KYAAHH!"

[Puhihihi! You damn bitch, I wasn't able to pull enough power from the Root because of you. What are you going to do about this? Hmm? All that time I spent has gone up in flames because of you!!!]

Flames covered Julia's entire body. Her skin was disfigured, and her beautiful face became so unsightly that it was hard to look at.

A horrible pain washed over her. She was about to lose consciousness because of the whirlpool of pain.

Thud.

"Huff! Huff! Huff!"

[Pui. I won't kill you. After all, Satan seems to have taken a liking to you.]

Mammon twisted his mouth and threw Julia aside.

Julia, who had suffered massive burns, was rolled on the ground.

[So, who did you say ambushed us?]

"U-Urhhh."

[It seems you can't talk anymore.] Mammon snickered and waddled forward. [Well, all right. I guess I'll find out once I go myself. Fucking hell, my precious time. Once I finish this, I'll have to stay asleep for a hundred years to just barely recover my power.]

The power of the Root that he had been absorbing all this time had gone up in smoke because he had been awakened too soon.

[Fuck, fuck, fuck. Should I just kill her?]

Mammon glanced at Julia. Then he clicked his tongue and turned around. He didn't want to cause problems with Satan just by killing such a worthless human being.

[Well, what's a hundred more years?]

For Immortals like them, a hundred years was nothing.

[It's been a while since I've been up and about, so I might as well let loose.]

Puhihihhi.

Mammon waddled up the stairs to where he could hear explosions.

\* \* \*

Crack!

Crash!

"ARRGGHH!"

[Wh-What the fuck!! Why is Balrog here?!] a demon exclaimed while stomping on the ground.

A whip covered with dark red flames swooshed through the air.

Boom!

There was an explosion of air as the whip struck the demons, causing their bodies to burst.

One demon had a fearful expression as he tried to escape.

[You cannot escape,] Balrog said in a low voice.

He wrapped his whip around the fleeing demon and pulled.

[L-Let go of me!! Sh-Shit! I never heard that Balrog would be h—]

[You're so noisy.] Balrog frowned. [Die.]

Crack. The demon's head exploded.

Balrog looked around and asked, [Have any escaped?]

[Hehehe. My subordinates are holding them down,] Vaal Zahak answered.

"Haaa. Haaa. I didn't let a single one go," Echidna said.

[...] Balrog walked toward Echidna, who was breathing heavily. [You do not need to push yourself, young dragon.]

"...I'm not pushing myself."

[No, I can feel your impatience. If you are doing this to be of help to the king, it is unneeded,]

Balrog told her quietly. [The king does not need help. He is a perfect being.]

"But Kang-Woo has been weakened because his power's sealed by the system. He's different from how he used to be in Hell."

[Hm?] Balrog tilted his head. [KAHAHAHAHAHAHA!! Yes, I do recall him saying that his power had been sealed by something called the Gaia System.]

"Are you not worried at all, Balrog? I don't know how Kang-Woo used to be in the past, but he's far weaker than b—"

[Do not worry, young dragon.] Balrog laughed. [You still have no idea who he is and what he is capable of.]

Step, step. They walked down the tunnel.

[You will soon see over time, young dragon.]

"..."

[Come to think of it, I believe you mentioned that you are the daughter of a demonic dragon named Kargath, correct?]

Echidna nodded.

[Then do you perhaps—]

BOOOOM—!!

FWOOSH—!!

Just as Balrog was about to say something, there was an explosion of giant flames.

Balrog's expression hardened.

[This is...]

It was a familiar energy.

Balrog clenched his giant hands into fists.

[Puih! Puihi! I was wondering who it could be, but... Balrog, huh?]

A grotesque ball of fat crawled up from below the tunnel.

[Mammon.]

Balrog's expression crumpled into anger.

The Lord of Inferno, the Demon of Greed... he had numerous titles, but there was one that was above them all—a prince of Hell.

[Puhihihhi! This is gonna be a lot more fun than I expected it to be! I can't believe I've come across a dog, who has lost its owner, in this world.]

Mammon was one of the seven demons who had been able to reach the position of a prince among the countless demons that lived in Hell. He was weaker than Satan and Lucifer, but he was still a prince regardless.

[Skeleton, young dragon. Run,] Balrog said, raising his whip.

Vaal Zahak and Echidna were fairly strong despite being new additions to the demon king's army, but they were no match for a prince of Hell.

[Go and bring the king,] Balrog added.

"That's not necessary," someone's calm voice rang out from behind.

Balrog turned to look and saw Kang-Woo walking leisurely along the gaps of the crumbled passageway.

"Mammon, huh?" Kang-Woo smiled. "Not bad."

Chapter 188 - Aspect of Fire (3)

'Fuck,' Oh Kang-Woo cursed in his mind while looking at Mammon.

He was smiling on the outside, but his insides were burning with frustration.

'Why the fuck is Mammon here?'

The Tibet base had thousands of Demon Cultists, so Kang-Woo had expected them to have some sort of trump card. However...

'I never expected that it would be a fucking prince of Hell.'

After learning that Lucifer had been revived, Kang-Woo expected the possibility of the other princes to be revived as well since their souls had remained intact within their Hell Armaments. Nonetheless, he had not thought of the possibility that their location of revival would be Earth.

'Just how?'

Kang-Woo couldn't understand how Mammon was here. There was no demonic energy on Earth, which meant there wasn't enough power to revive the soul of a prince of Hell. It was as if a giant tree had grown in the middle of a desolate desert.

[Y-You're...!]

It wasn't just Kang-Woo who was surprised though.

Unlike Kang-Woo who looked calm on the outside, there was a demon who was trembling in fear with a pale face.

[Wh-Why are you—H-How? What in the...]

It was Mammon; he was trembling due to the immense fear he felt.

[Y-You were definitely annihilated!!]

"What?" Kang-Woo frowned.

'Why is he claiming I died?'

Kang-Woo? Annihilated? What nonsense was Mammon talking about?

Mammon shouted like a madman, [Y-You were annihilated after clashing with the system!! I-I saw it with my own eyes!! Wh-Why are you still alive, you monsteeeeerrrrr!!!]

He'd shouted in a desperate voice, spitting saliva everywhere.

Kang-Woo remained silent. His gaze sharpened as he thought about Mammon's words.

"Oh," he uttered.

'I see what happened.'

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief.

He realized there was a very simple explanation.

'These sons of bitches thought I had died.'

It wasn't out of the realm of possibility.

Kang-Woo had clashed with the Gaia System while returning to Earth. That system, which was protecting Earth, had used all of its power to seal his Ten Thousand Demon Core. The seal was so powerful that he was still unable to remove it completely.

The senses of the princes of Hell had been severely weakened as their souls had been within the Hell Armaments. So, it made sense that after sensing Kang-Woo's power suddenly diminish, they thought he had been annihilated.

'Wait, but Lucifer thinks I'm still alive.'

Lucifer had definitely gone to Earth to find the Demonic Sea.

"..."

Kang-Woo kept thinking.

It didn't take him long to find an answer. There was one difference between the two princes.

'Lucifer is on the continent of Aernor, and Mammon is on Earth.'

This meant that Lucifer had been blown into a different dimension before Kang-Woo had clashed with the system. In that case, the situation made sense.

'This...'

The tips of Kang-Woo's mouth went up.

'I can use this.'

He slowly approached Mammon.

"You thought I died? Really?"

[E-Eek! D-Don't come any closer!!]

"Answer me, Mammon," Kang-Woo said in a cold, emotionless voice.

'Look straight.'

Asserting one's spirit was part of the basics of deception. One shouldn't be intimidated or hesitant.

[U-Umm...]

Kang-Woo stood upright with his back straight and spoke as firmly as possible.

"I will not beat around the bush, Mammon. Serve me."

It was far too risky to battle a prince of Hell in this situation. However, if he could make use of Mammon, all the better.

'Though I have absolutely no intention of actually taking him in as a subordinate.'

Mammon was different from Balrog and Lilith. He was a prince, and a prince couldn't serve anyone.

If Mammon were to discover that Kang-Woo's power had been sealed, his attitude would change completely. It was comparable to hugging a bomb that could explode at any moment.

'But I can stall for time.'

If Mammon agreed to serve him, he could buy some time as Mammon racked his brain to figure out what to do while serving him. As long as Kang-Woo used Mammon effectively, he could even ambush Mammon in the future and deal great harm to him.

[Serve... you?]

"Are you not sick and tired of the Nine Hells? The red sky, the barren lands, the terrible air... It's an absolute landfill."

[...]

"Compared to that, this star is beautiful. Do you not want it? Do you not want to hold it, bend it to your will, and dirty it?" Kang-Woo said in an appealing voice.

He could see Mammon's eyes, barely visible between his flaps of fat, filled with thick greed.

"Mammon." Kang-Woo extended his hand. "Do you want to rule this world with me?"

[I...]

Mammon's voice trailed off. His eyes were trembling.

'He fell for it.'

Kang-Woo was sure of it. He smiled widely.

'I guess I've taken care of the most urgent p—'

Rumble—!!!

At that moment... the tunnel shook and cracked. Magma poured out from the gaps in the cracks.

BOOOOM!!

The ceiling of the tunnel collapsed.

"Kuh!"

Kang-Woo raised his hand and used the Authority of Waves to turn the rubble into dust, disappearing with a loud boom.

'Shit!!'

Kang-Woo quickly turned his head.

He could see Mammon staring at him with those eyes that were buried under the fat.

[Oh...?]

The tips of Mammon's mouth curved upward.

He felt Kang-Woo's power when he turned the falling ceiling to dust.

[Puhhi. You've gotten weaker.]

'For fuck's sake.'

Kang-Woo clenched his hands into fists.

Negotiations had broken down, and on top of that, the amount of magma pouring into the tunnel was increasing.

'Shit.'

Kang-Woo frowned.



He used the Authority of the Beholder and sensed demonic energy running wild within the heart of the mountain.

'If I don't stop it, the volcano will erupt.'

Guardians members and the Demon Cult were fighting outside. It was easy to see what would happen if a volcano erupted in that situation.

'Everyone will die.'

They were superhumans, but they were mere mortals before natural disasters. Although he had orchestrated the bloodshed of Guardians through this war, causing that many casualties akin to causing complete destruction was a completely different story.

'It'd be more like blowing their brains out instead of making them bleed a little.'

Kang-Woo turned to Balrog.

"Balrog. Take Lilith, Echidna, and Vaal Zahak and stop the demonic energy running wild underneath."

[But...]

"I'll take care of things here."

[Understood.]

Balrog hesitated for a moment after hearing Kang-Woo would face a prince of Hell by himself, but he nodded in the end.

[May your will be done, my king.]

Balrog took Echidna and Vaal Zahak and went downstairs.

Kang-Woo wasn't sure where Lilith was, but he trusted Balrog to find her and take her underneath too.

"Fuck," Kang-Woo cursed aggressively.

He turned back toward Mammon.

Mammon laughed, [Puhihihihihihhi!!!! To think the demon king has become this weak!!! Yes, what I saw that day was true!!!]

His body shook as if he couldn't hold back his joy. He grinned, with saliva dripping out of the side of his lips.

[In that case... this is the perfect opportunity for me to obtain the Demonic Sea.]

Mammon didn't need to wait a hundred years. He would obtain power incomparable to what Satan would obtain, as he was absorbing the Root.

[Puhihihihihihhi!!!!]

Mammon grabbed his stomach and roared with laughter. Gobs of his saliva spurted out of his mouth in all directions.

Kang-Woo remained silent while watching Mammon laugh.

"Hah," he feigned laughter.

He glared at Mammon with deep, sunken eyes.

"Stop giggling, damn pig."

Kang-Woo lowered his hands. The Key of the Demonic Sea turned into a dark red spear.

"Have you still not had enough of a beating?"

Kang-Woo had already beaten this damn pig once before. This loser had even bowed down to him while begging pathetically for his life.

He found it hilarious how Mammon was laughing so confidently now.

BOOM!

Kang-Woo stomped on the ground and shot forward, gripping his spear as he thrust it at the lump of fat.

FWOOSH!

[Puhihihhi!]

Red flames poured out.

Sizzle.

Kang-Woo's skin was getting burned by the flames, but he ignored it. He stabbed Mammon with the spear and used the Authority of Explosion, causing lumps of Mammon's flesh to fall off.

BOOM!

A blazing hand emerged from under Mammon's wounded flesh. It shot toward Kang-Woo at blinding speed and with great power.

Nevertheless, Kang-Woo twisted to the side and dodged it. The blazing hand struck the tunnel wall instead, vaporizing about thirty meters of the wall.

Kang-Woo tightened his right fist and used the Authority of Titanic Might merged with the Authority of Waves.

Crack!

He punched Mammon, and Mammon's flesh exploded again, splashing sticky pus onto Kang-Woo's face.

Tsss.

The pus burned through his skin like acid, melting away his cheeks and revealing his teeth. His fist that he had stuck into Mammon's flesh had melted down to the bone.

Still, Kang-Woo ignored all of it.

He gripped Gáe Bulg. Massive amounts of demonic energy swirled around him, and he created Gungnir.

'It's not enough.'

Kang-Woo needed to add more Authorities.



His hand was suddenly cut with condensed sword energy and fell off.

"How dare you..."

Kim Si-Hun stood between the sphere and Mammon.

"Don't you dare touch my brother with those filthy hands, cholesterol."

Blue energy burst out from him.

Chapter 189 - Why Did You Do It?

[Brother, you say?]

Mammon frowned.

He never heard about the demon king having a brother. No, he wasn't even sure if the concept of relatives applied to Kang-Woo.

[Puhihihi. You sure experience all kinds of things after living for so long.]

It was unexpected that there was someone who claimed to be the demon king's brother.

'Not just that...'

The supposed brother was a mere human.

[Hihihi. Human, I'm honestly not in the mood for fighting. Why don't you step aside?] Mammon snickered.

He was laughing as if he were having fun, but in reality, he was extremely irritated.

'Annoying.'

Mammon still felt intense pain from his fight with the demon king.

The demon king's power had been sealed, but he was ultimately still a demon king, which was proven by his last attack. A step too late, and the attack would have frozen Mammon completely. He would have died.

Mammon had done his best to dodge the attack. However, half of his body had been frozen and torn apart, so there was no way he could just shrug it off.

'Annoying, annoying.'

He bit his lip anxiously.

Mammon hadn't fully recovered yet. Rather, the injury couldn't be healed naturally. Even if he did recover somehow, his power would be permanently reduced. That was how severe the demon king's last attack was.

[Puihi! Annoying... So annoying...]

Mammon narrowed his eyes.

He had to steal the Demonic Sea from the demon king as soon as possible to treat himself, but a lowly human was getting in his way.

[Hihi. Move, human.]

FWOOSH!

Viscous lava-like flames poured out over the ground, which had been frozen by the demon king's attack, and targeted Si-Hun.

"Fuuu."

Si-Hun raised his sword.

The heat was burning his skin, but he didn't have the time to protect his body by enveloping his body with Qi.

'Shit.'

The demon in front of him was completely different from the ones he'd faced until that point.

FWOOSH!

"Kuh!!"

The flames struck Si-Hun. He was pushed back and sent rolling on the ground.

"Kurgh! Cough! Cough!"

Black smoke emerged from his mouth as he coughed, and horrifying burns contorted his skin.

The demon's power was overwhelming. He was so strong that Si-Hun wondered if one being could hold this much power. Half of the El Cuero Blade had melted down from just one attack.

'What... is this?'

This demon was different.

The demons that Si-Hun had faced thus far had been nothing like this. No matter how strong they were, they weren't nearly as strong as Mammon. Their powers were beyond comparison.

'Shit.'

Si-Hun trembled, and fear started to overwhelm him. His face turned pale, and he was having trouble breathing.

Then, a familiar voice flowed into his mind.

"I'm sorry for..."

That voice had been etched into his brain.

It seemed to be saying that this was his limit; it was as far as he could go. That voice was the chains holding Si-Hun back.

"Shut... up," he said to the voice echoing in his mind.

Si-Hun gritted his teeth and stood up. It wasn't the time to be swayed by the voice.

He grabbed the half-melted sword.

[Hm?]

Mammon frowned.

It'd been a long time since he'd seen a human be able to remain standing even after receiving such severe burns.

[Ihiihi.]

Notes of irritation mixed in with Mammon's laughter.

Then Mammon snapped his finger. Streams of yellow flames spread from his body and engulfed Si-Hun like a net.

"Kuh!" Si-Hun grunted.

Gripping his sword with both hands, he raised it above his forehead.

Si-Hun recalled the senses that he had felt when he had received enlightenment regarding the Heavenly Dragon Flash that he had used against Halphas.

Upon seeing a faint ray of blue light in the air that should not be there, he swung his sword along it.

SLASH!!

He used the same attack that had cut Halphas's attack in half to cut the net. This created an opening, and Si-Hun leaped through it.

Mammon looked at him with great interest.

[Wow.]

He was surprised that a human could counter his attack.

"Haap!" Si-Hun yelled while charging toward Mammon.

Giant streams of flames surged toward him from both sides, but Si-Hun quickly moved to dodge them.

Tsss.

Nevertheless, he still got burned, and smoke rose from his sizzling skin.

"Shit!" he cursed.

The speed of the flames was an issue, but the biggest issue was their power.

'It's insane.'

Si-Hun couldn't find any other word to describe it. He felt as if the entire world had fallen into a blazing hell.

He moved frantically, evading the streams of flames.

[Puhiihi.]

Mammon laughed and raised his hands.

Crack.

The ground split open, and magma burning yellow surged up from the crack and poured down on Si-Hun like a tsunami.

"Gasp!"

Si-Hun drew out his Qi and created a wall of Qi as hard as steel. However, it was useless; steel was nothing before Mammon's flames.

"Kuuuurrghh!!"

TSSS!!

Si-Hun's hand that was holding the El Cuero Blade was burned. The flames destroyed the skin and flesh, burning right down to his bones.

"A-Arrghh."

Clatter.

The sword fell to the ground, and Si-Hun curled up into the fetal position while holding his burned hand. An immense pain that he'd never felt before spread from his hand to the rest of his body.

[Hihihi. That's why I told you to step aside.]

Mammon laughed and waddled toward Kang-Woo, who had been locked away by Greed. He slowly reached toward his delicious meal.

Tap.

[Huh...?]

Something pulled on his leg.

Mammon looked down.

"I told you... not to touch... him."

Si-Hun grabbed the half-melted El Cuero Blade with his other hand, which hadn't been burned down to the bone, and gathered blue condensed sword energy around it. He then brought the sword down onto Mammon's foot, stabbing it without hesitation.

Stab!

[H-Hihihihi!!] Mammon let out a burst of craze-filled laughter.

Si-Hun's attack hadn't done much damage, but it had been enough to irritate Mammon.

Mammon raised his injured foot.

Bash!!

"Kurgh!"

[You're a much more annoying human than I'd thought you were.]

Mammon kicked Si-Hun away and walked toward him as he rolled onto the ground.

Si-Hun's desperation had been enough to stir Mammon into taking further action.

Tap.

Mammon stepped on Si-Hun's still-functioning hand and slowly pressed his weight onto it.

Crack!

"Arrghh!!!" Si-Hun let out a desperate cry.





The surface of the yellow sphere was destroyed. An arm stretched out from it and grabbed Mammon's head.

[...Huh?] Mammon mumbled confusedly.

The arm pulled Mammon backward.

[Wh-What the—?!]

Mammon's eyes were full of astonishment. An incredible strength was dragging his giant body backward.

Mammon hurriedly turned his head and looked at the arm that had emerged from Greed.

His mouth fell open in shock.

[Th-The Hell Armament was destroyed?!]

That was impossible. The Hell Armaments had been materialized from millions of years' worth of condensed demonic energy of the Ninth Hell. They symbolized the power of the princes of Hell. These transcendental weapons were powerful enough to tear apart space and time itself.

Yet, Mammon's armament, which he'd thought couldn't be destroyed, had been shattered.

Split.

The crack in Greed widened. Kang-Woo's upper body emerged from it, starting with his arm, shoulder, and then his head.

"Mammon," Kang-Woo said quietly, pulling Mammon's head closer to him. "Why did you do it?"

Kang-Woo dragged Mammon over to him until they were staring at each other face to face.

"Hm? I'm asking you why."

[Y-You damn monster...!]

"I get it for the other people. Baek Kang-Hyun, Kim Jae-Hyun, Julia... They knew nothing, so I didn't mind it."

[L-Let go of me!!]

Flames surged out from Mammon. Kang-Woo's arm took the full brunt of the flames, but Kang-Woo's grip on Mammon's head did not loosen.

"But not you."

Kang-Woo spoke as if he couldn't understand why Mammon had made such a stupid decision.

"You know who I am."

The whites of his eyes turned black.

"You know what I'm capable of."

His irises turned yellow.

"So..."

His black pupils stretched horizontally across the yellow irises.

"Why did you do it?"

While he was still holding Mammon's head, Kang-Woo placed his other hand over his chest where the Ten Thousand Demon Core was.

Rumble—!!

The entire mountain shook. The ground became warped, and a thunderous sound reverberated through the space.

"Why did you do it?"

There was no answer from Mammon. He just stared at Kang-Woo with a pale expression. He was trembling like a mischievous child who had been caught red-handed by their parents or like prey staring at a predator.

"Huh? Speak up."

Kang-Woo smiled deeply. He rotated the hand that he'd placed over the Ten Thousand Demon Core. Ten Thousand Demon Core...

Second Door, open.

"Why did you fight me?"

Chapter 190 - In That Moment, the Demons Remembered

[A-Aaaaahhhhh!!] Mammon screamed.

He summoned as much demonic energy as he could to attack Oh Kang-Woo.

Mammon formed a giant tsunami of fire. The ground split further, and red magma poured out from the cracks. A vortex of heat covered the surroundings.

Yet...

Gurgle, gurgle.

Kang-Woo's burning body melted into black mucus, and countless mouths appeared within it.

[E-Eek!]

Mammon trembled in terror.

Trauma that had been deeply engraved in his mind resurfaced. The fear that hadn't disappeared even after a thousand years swept over him.

The countless mouths were grinding their teeth eagerly.

Kang-Woo didn't look like a human anymore. No, he didn't even look like a living organism.

[S-Stay away!!]

Mammon took a step back. He knew what the appearance of those mouths meant.

[W-Wait! I-I was wrong!]

He shook his head. Mammon knew better than anyone else that it was already too late. The nightmare had returned. His flesh was being chewed away. The flames that encompassed him and the barrier of demonic energy were both meaningless.

Mammon looked at his arm, which was being covered by the black mucus. The small mouths in the mucus were devouring his flesh. They were nightmarish mouths that consumed everything without leaving a trace.

Considering the time and effort he had spent on Earth to restore his body, it was obvious that Mammon would be afraid. There was only one way to separate the mouths that had already latched on to his body.

He frowned and burned off his own arm.

FWOOSH.

[Shit! Shit! Shit!] Mammon cursed aggressively.

His characteristic laugh could no longer be heard.

The black mucus that had spread all over the floor started to move toward him again.

Mammon fell backward and rolled away. His body, which was closer to being a ball of fat, rolled just like a ball.

It was a foolish spectacle though. He wasn't even rolling particularly fast.

He was the strongest among the princes of Hell in terms of firepower, but his agility fell behind even that of a regular demon due to his obesity.

The black mucus caught up to him instantly.

[G-Get away!]

Mammon, who was still rolling backward, grabbed an object that had fallen to the ground.

It was a yellow sphere that was about 1.5 meters in diameter—Mammon's Hell Armament, Greed. Kang-Woo had destroyed one side of the armament when he broke out of it, but its overwhelming power hadn't disappeared.

Mammon grabbed Greed and created a wall of flames.

TSSS!

[H-Hihihihi!]

It blocked the approaching black mucus.

Mammon snickered.

'I stopped it.'

His Hell Armament, a weapon that could be called the essence of the Nine Hells, was still as powerful as ever.

[H-Hihihi!]

Crazed laughter emerged from his mouth.

'He's definitely become weaker,' Mammon thought.

In the past, after the battle with Balrog, Mammon had once faced the demon king when he was in the form of the black mucus.

Back then, the black mucus had been voluminous enough to cover the entire sky. However, Mammon could certainly put up a fight against it at its current size.

Hope appeared in his eyes.

Tss! Tss!

[Hihihi! It's useless!]

He laughed loudly like a villain who was protected behind bulletproof glass.

Then, the black mucus stopped pouring toward the wall.

'D-Did it work?'

Mammon peeked out of the wall to take a glimpse at Kang-Woo.

[...Huh?]

Gurgle, gurgle.

The black mucus was gathering in one place.

Ten meters...

Five meters...

Three meters...

One meter...

The black mucus was shrinking.

A chilling fear ran down Mammon's back. He couldn't help but feel that something was wrong.

[Wh-What's going on?]

He hadn't seen anything like this back when he fought against the demon king in Hell.

The black mucus was being compressed to a single point. Compared to its size, the demonic energy it possessed was getting absurdly powerful.

An enormous amount of demonic energy was running wild like how demonic energy burst out of Rifts.

[E-Eek!]

Mammon swung Greed, and the fire spread as if he'd swung a fan. The flames covered the black mucus, which disappeared without leaving a trace.

[Huh?]

He looked around in confusion.

[Wh-What? Did it disappear?]



He'd ignored them because it was a hassle, but he was willing to endure it now.

[L-Lord Mammon?]

The mouths of the demons looking at him widened in shock.

Mammon tilted his head and said, [Pui. What?]

[U-Umm...]

[Your face...]

[Hm?]

Mammon touched his face in confusion. Black blood was pouring out from his fat nose. It was coming out from his ears, eyes, and mouth too.

[Wh-What the hell is this?]

Mammon anxiously touched all over his body.

Crack! Crunch!

[Aaarrggghh!!]

Immense pain swept through him as black blood spewed out from his fatty flesh. His shoulders, chest, arms, waist, groin, thighs, legs, and feet... Black blood poured out of them like a waterfall.

[E-Eek!]

Mammon looked down at the black blood spilling out of him. He was trembling from the pain.

[N-No,] he mumbled frantically.

What was on the floor wasn't his blood. No, it wasn't blood in the first place.

It was...

[ARRGGHH!]

The pain was enough to make him go crazy.

The black mucus that poured out from Mammon spread out across the floor. It covered a radius of not just ten to twenty meters but five hundred meters.

[Wh-What the hell is this?!]

[Argh! M-My legs!!]

[R-Run...]

Chaos ensued.

It looked as if the night sky had covered the ground. Mouths appeared from the darkness and began to devour every demon nearby.

Horrible screams rang out with the sounds of flesh being chewed and bones being broken.

[A-Aaarrghh!] Mammon screamed. [Wh-Why don't you die?! Why, why!!]

He recalled the face of the monster laughing at him.



[Satan.]

The enormous demon trembled pitifully and thought of Satan, who was far north, under the land of ice.

[We were wrong.]

The thousands of years they'd spent on Earth... After all that time they had spent without the demon king, they'd forgotten one thing. No, they had always known it, but they had tried to ignore it.

[That monster...]

The demon of demons, the Hell of Hells, the predator of predators...

[We can't defeat it.]

Crush!

The darkness, which spanned over five hundred meters wide, compressed instantly and devoured Mammon's gigantic body.

This was Mammon's second defeat. As for the next round... it didn't exist.