

## **M. in Hell 231**

Chapter 231 - The Truth Will Never Die (3)

Hurried steps echoed through a giant dark and icy cave.

"L-Lord Satan!!!" a man dressed in a black robe called out as he ran further into the cave.

Inside, a huge black sphere, which was about thirty meters in diameter, shook. The darkness that protruded from the sphere moved, and a red demon mask appeared at the end of it.

[What is it?]

"Y-You see..." the priest mumbled, his gaze wavering.

He took a deep breath before speaking again.

"Our signal... was hijacked."

[What?]

The darkness shook. It seemed that Satan couldn't understand what the priest was saying.

"The signal was hijacked? What does that mean?"

"The Mirror of Darkness that Apostle Julia is using is currently connected with someone else."

[Wait, then why has Julia not immediately contacted me?]

Satan still couldn't understand what was going on.

If the signal had been hijacked and the Mirror of Darkness had connected with someone else, there was no way Julia wouldn't have noticed. She would've tried to contact him another way or destroyed the Mirror of Darkness.

"Well..."

The priest wasn't sure how he was supposed to explain it. Ultimately, he gave up and simply informed Satan of what had happened.

"Someone claiming to be Satan... has appeared and is speaking as you."

[That... That bastard again??] Satan asked, about to go crazy from rage.

Satan had an impersonator. He couldn't understand what kind of resentment his impersonator had toward him, but his impersonator always claimed to be Satan while causing all sorts of trouble.

Satan felt like he would lose his mind from the rage if he thought about all the plans that his impersonator had screwed up.

[Even Julia was deceived by him?]

"Yes. The impersonator is saying something very similar to what we had planned, so not even Sister Julia seems to know what is going on."

[He's saying something similar to what was planned...?]

"Yes, the plan to frame Guardians as the culprits of Ludwig's corruption. He is carrying out that plan very similarly... No, to be honest, he is carrying it out much better than what we had planned to do."

[...]

There was a short silence, and Satan's eyes quivered.

'That is impossible.'

He had a rough idea of who his impersonator was.

Satan didn't want to admit it, but he could only think of one being who could do something like this. And there was absolutely no way that man would help him.

'He is a monster.'

That man was the nightmare of Hell—a tyrant who had appeared in Hell out of the blue after the forces of each of the seven princes of Hell had been established and unchanged for a very long time. No other demon had as much desire as him.

Satan trembled when he recalled the man's desires and obsessions, which bordered on madness, as well as the thousand-year war.

[Get the signal back,] Satan quickly said.

"Th-That is impossible. Lord Kalgia's priests are already doing their best to get it back, but the magic pattern is far too complicated for us to decipher it and get the signal back." The priest gulped. "The only thing we can do at the moment is to get back a portion of the signal and watch the call live..."

[Guh. Do at least that, then.]

"Yes, my lord!"

The priest manipulated the crystal in front of Satan.

They saw Raphael, Julia Vilkova, the angels, and...

[What...?]

Satan's eyes widened in shock when his gaze landed on a certain human in the video. He was horrified to see the young man, who had a piercing gaze.

[Why is the demon king... Wait, then who is...]

Satan fell into chaos as he recalled the countless Authorities of the demon king.

[I-It must be...!]

He started to tremble.

Satan assumed his worst possible theory had to be right.

[Authority of Cloning...]

Satan's gaze sank. The gears in his mind turned extremely quickly.

[Find him.]

"Pardon...?"

[The Authority of Cloning cannot be maintained over long distances. He is surely staging this story with his clone somewhere near the angels' fortress.]

Satan had suffered from that tactic a few times. He shook with rage.

[I will not be fooled again.]

He thought it was a good opportunity. He wasn't sure why the demon king was impersonating him, but...

'It ends now.'

Satan would expose the demon king's scheme for all to see. If he were lucky, he might be able to turn Raphael's attention away from him and toward the demon king instead.

'I will take off his mask of mischief with my own hands.'

Satan would then destroy everything that the demon king had cultivated here on Earth. He would serve vengeance on the demon king, living up to his nickname, Prince of Revenge.

[Mobilize as many forces as possible!! Find where the signal is being hijacked from! Kill his clone!]

Clones created with the Authority of Cloning weren't very strong. As long as this clone was found, it could be killed very easily.

'It is your turn to suffer this time.'

Satan's yellow eyes shone while glaring at the demon king in the video.

\* \* \*

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

Raphael slowly asked, "Why should I believe you?"

[...]

Satan didn't answer.

After maintaining the silence for a while, he said, [You are free to do as you like, Raphael. As long as I have the Demonic Sea, you and I are destined to kill each other. However...]

He let out a chilling laugh, turned his head, and looked to where Kang-Woo was standing.

[I do not take kindly to the fact that small fry like them dare to use my name under their mask of hypocrisy.]

"Satan..." Kang-Woo uttered while glowering at Satan. Then he turned to Raphael. "Lord Raphael, please do not believe what this wicked demon is say—"

"Quiet, human."

"So, you do doubt us." Kang-Woo sighed after seeing Raphael's reaction. "Very well. Like Satan said, you can investigate the Hall of Protection while using his demonic energy as reference."

"Are you confident?"

"We know why you suspect us as well as how much you cared for Ludwig. However, we are innocent. Ludwig was corrupted due to Satan's scheme."

"..."

Raphael fell silent again, his feelings of doubt evident on his face. He was stuck between the words of Satan and Guardians. Frankly, he couldn't believe either of them.

"Ludwig..."

He called the name of his apostle—a human who had put more faith in the light than anyone else. Ludwig had possessed incredible talent, an indomitable will, and strong beliefs. He had been a very important apostle to Raphael.

There weren't many humans capable of abandoning their family and friends for the sake of the light. Losing such a loyal apostle was painful, even for Raphael.

'At the very least, I shall avenge you with my own hands,' Raphael vowed.

He looked at Kang-Woo, Kim Si-Hun, and Satan with sharp eyes.

'Who...?'

Who was lying? Raphael's mind was in jumbles.

'There is only one way to find out.'

Raphael got up.

"I will investigate the truth by finding traces of your demonic energy."

[Good choice.]

Raphael walked away slowly.

Julia raised both hands while smiling slyly. A demonic crystal that Satan had prepared appeared in her hands.

Si-Hun's expression hardened when he saw it.

"Hyung-nim... Will this really be okay? If Satan did something in the Hall of Protection, we're..." Si-Hun said worriedly.

He was sure that Guardians hadn't corrupted Ludwig because every single core member had been present when they received Ludwig's call. However, seeing that Satan was so confident in trying to mess with them, Si-Hun couldn't help but think that he had some sort of plan.

"This is all because I wasn't able to save..." Si-Hun mumbled, blaming himself for this crisis.

If he had subdued the corrupted Ludwig instead of killing him, they wouldn't have been subject to such unfair suspicions.

'If we end up falling for another one of Satan's schemes...' Si-Hun thought.

He felt like he would never be able to stop blaming himself.

"Don't worry, Si-Hun," Kang-Woo replied firmly. He bit his lip as he grabbed Si-Hun's shoulder.  
"No matter how hard they try to conceal the truth with lies..."

How much of the sun could a person cover with the palm of their hands? Wasn't the burning light visible precisely because it was dark?

"The truth will never die," Kang-Woo concluded.

It would keep burning bright.

\* \* \*

[...What in the world?] Satan mumbled in confusion while watching the call. [Just why?]

He'd never corrupted Ludwig. Moreover, no Demon Cultist had even laid a hand on Ludwig, so the culprit was most definitely the demon king.

Then...

'Why...?'

How could the demon king be so confident?

If the angels were to use the demonic crystal that contained Satan's demonic energy, they should be able to figure out that there weren't traces of his demonic energy inside the Hall of Protection. In that case, Guardians would be framed as the culprits and executed by Raphael's own hands like Satan wanted.

'There is no way he does not know that.'

Satan's mind was in jumbles. He couldn't help but feel uneasy.

[Hurry up and find his clone!!] he quickly exclaimed.

They had to stop the demon king before he did something.

"Um, L-Lord Satan..."

[Now!!]

"You see..."

The priest was trembling.

[...What is it?]

"W-We've just received a report. They've figured out where the magic was being manipulated from."

[Then subdue the clone and take back the signal. Quick.]

"Well..."

The priest's face was pale, and he was shaking even harder now. He couldn't wrap his mind around what was going on.

"Th-They weren't able to find a clone."

[Then he must be calling from somewhere else.] Satan's expression crumpled in frustration. [It matters not.]

It was too bad that they hadn't been able to locate the clone, but this was good enough for the moment. The demon king was using some sort of medium to intercept the transmission magic and was using it himself.

[Destroy that area and cut the connection to the Mirror of Darkness.]

They could solve the problem by physically destroying the physical medium. In other words, since they couldn't stop the hacking through the software, they just had to destroy the hardware that was doing it.

It didn't matter what advanced magic device was being used. If they destroyed it, it wouldn't be able to function anymore.

"W-Well..." the priest continued confusedly, "Th-There is no connected signal at all."

[...What? What does that mean?]

"That footage coming out of the Mirror of Darkness is..."

Gulp.

"Pre-recorded."

Chapter 232 - The Truth Will Never Die (4)

[What... did you say?] Satan mumbled in confusion.

How could the footage that was playing right now be pre-recorded? That made no sense at all.

[They are talking right now! How could that possibly be pre-recorded?!]

Satan turned his head toward the footage that was being replayed in the crystal.

Raphael certainly appeared to be talking with the fake Satan in the red demon mask, but... the priest said that everything that the fake Satan was saying was pre-recorded...?

"W-We have no idea what is going on either."

The priest wearing a black robe shook his head, just as confused as Satan. There was one way that it could be possible, but...

'There is no way that anyone could possibly...'

The priest's eyes trembled.

There was only one way to make pre-recorded footage like that work in a conversation...

"I-If he calculated the entire conversation beforehand... and recorded based on that... I-It is possible."

[...What?] Satan uttered in surprise.

What kind of nonsense was that?

[He calculated... the entire conversation with Raphael?]

"Yes. If he calculated that and spoke based on how he predicted they would react... I-It is not within the realm of impossibility."

The priest grabbed his forehead in confusion despite having said it himself.

After all, how could someone actualize that even if it were possible in theory? How could they calculate what the other party would say and when?

Moreover, it wasn't even a simple conversation. Raphael and Fake Satan's conversation had been going on for more than five minutes.

How could he have predicted each line as well as calculated the precise time that Raphael would say it?

'Just how...?'

It was an extremely dangerous bet. If the pre-recorded line was even a second early, the plan would be completely ruined.

[U-Urghh...] Satan's voice trembled.

If it was pre-recorded footage, there was no way to stop it from the outside. However, he couldn't send soldiers into the angels' fortress either.

If he were to do that, all of his efforts to dismantle the relationship between the angels and Guardians would have been for naught. No, that might not even be the extent of it. There was even a chance that an all-out war between them and the angels might take place.

It was checkmate; Satan had lost.

[Demon king...] Satan mumbled as he watched the footage.

\* \* \*

"This is the demonic crystal containing Lord Satan's demonic energy."

Julia Vilkova continued to kneel while she raised her hand, offering up the black crystal orb. Demonic energy flowed from it.

As Raphael slowly walked toward her...

BOOM!!

The rumble of an explosion rang out. It was not from the fortress but the Mirror of Darkness.

"Hm?"

Raphael, Kim Si-Hun, Oh Kang-Woo, and Julia shifted their gazes to the black crystal orb.

In the footage, Satan turned away.

[What happened?] he asked.

[Kuh, L-Lord Satan!!] someone quickly shouted.

Light entered the scene, which had been filled with darkness. A demon covered in green tentacles had opened the door to the room.

The clamor of things crashing rang out continuously.

"What in the..."

Raphael frowned at the unexpected development of events.

He couldn't understand what was happening over there.

[H-He has escaped!] a demon who seemed like Satan's subordinate quickly shouted.

Satan's eyes trembled behind the mask.

Crash!

The wall of the room was destroyed, and someone appeared from the destroyed wall.

"A-Aaaaahh."

[Kuh... I... will never... submit to...]

The man's skin was pale as a corpse's. He had deep, dark circles under his eyes and hollow cheeks.

The footage was showing Ludwig, who was exuding thick demonic energy.

[Hah...] Satan snickered at the absurdity of events. [I did not expect things to end up this way.]

While watching the footage, Julia felt as if she had been smacked in the back of the head.

"Lord Satan...?" she called out to Satan in panic. Then she exclaimed in confusion, "L-Lord Satan, what is happening?! Who is—"

Julia had never seen Ludwig, so she couldn't tell that the man corrupted by demonic energy in the footage was Ludwig.

"Lord Satan!!!"

[To think that I would make such a nonsensical mistake...]

Satan ignored Julia as if he couldn't hear her. His voice expressed how much of a bind he was in.

He shook his head and clicked his tongue.

[Tsk. It seems the plan has failed.]

Ludwig had appeared while Satan had been carrying out his plan to frame Guardians as the culprits for Ludwig's corruption. Now, nothing he said could amend the situation.

"Sa... tan."

Rumble—!!

Raphael glared at Satan. He radiated brilliantly, and the power of that radiance shook the fortress.

BOOM!

He stomped on the ground.

"What have you done... to Ludwig?"

Raphael's gaze quivered. He had an idea of what Satan had done.

There was a forbidden magic that could raise the dead as evil beings that went against the providence of the universe—a magic that created Undead.

Raphael was greatly shocked upon seeing that Ludwig, someone who loved and served the light more than anyone else, had been reduced to an Undead.



"SAATAANN!!!"

Raphael's scream spread throughout the whole place, his voice giving off rage that bordered on madness.

Julia's expression paled, and shouted anxiously, "Lord Satan! Wh-What are you talking about?! N-No, why is Ludwig th—"

She suddenly noticed something.

Julia's mouth fell open.

"Wait... Where is that...?"

Satan was in a cave that was covered in transparent ice and about a hundred meters wide. There was no wall to be broken.

"Wh-What in the world is..."

Julia trembled. She realized something had gone wrong. That wasn't where her master, Satan, was staying.

"Who... are you?" she asked in a shaky voice.

That demon wearing a red mask wasn't her master; it was someone else.

"Hah," Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. He grimaced after seeing Julia's shameless attitude. "How unsightly."

It couldn't get any more unsightly than this for Satan. His scheme had failed.

From the moment Ludwig appeared as an Undead, Satan had run out of excuses he could use. His wicked machinations wouldn't work anymore.

"How... How dare you!" Raphael roared angrily.

He spread his hand, and an enormous amount of light gathered in it, forming a spear.

Raphael grabbed the spear, which was radiating light, and shouted at Satan, "How far... How far must you violate my apostles until you are satisfied?!!!"

Raphael's shout shook the entire fortress.

[Hm...]

Satan pondered. He shook his head as if he were troubled by the situation. Then he reached out and grabbed Ludwig's neck.

[Kurgh!] Ludwig uttered. [L-Let me go!!]

He was struggling desperately.

Darkness flowed from Satan's body and encroached Ludwig.

[A-Aaaaahh.]

Ludwig let out a groan that sounded like it would be cut short at any moment.

He trembled so intensely that it was as if he were having a seizure. Then, he was completely dyed black by the darkness.

[Now that it has come to this... I have no choice,] Satan said, shaking his head.

His eyes were full of madness as he looked at Raphael.

Satan snickered.

[Do you feel the madness?]

"..."

[Do you feel your reason flying away from the rage? Is your head getting hot? Is your vision blurring? Is your heart beating faster?]

"You..."

[Ha, HAHAAHAHAHA!!!] Satan burst out laughing. [Do not forget that feeling, Raphael.]

Satan threw Ludwig, sending him rolling on the ground. It was as if Satan was throwing away a toy that he didn't want to play with anymore.

Raphael's eyes turned white, and rage devoured his rationality.

Satan smiled.

[That is wrath.]

"Did you... do this on purpose?" Raphael's voice trembled.

There was one thing he could conclude from Satan's actions.

Sending a servant of evil to the angels' fortress, offering a bold proposal, releasing Ludwig on purpose, and then acting as if the plan had failed... Raphael was convinced that Satan had planned all of it from the very beginning.

[HAHAHAHA!! It was only a coincidence. No, I guess 'mistake' is a better word for it.]

Satan laughed while grabbing his stomach.

Raphael's suspicions were confirmed by Satan's reaction.

"Why... Why did you do something so..."

There was no need to even ask; Satan's objective was obvious—wrath. He was trying to wrap Raphael around his finger by making him lose his mind from wrath.

Raphael's expression crumpled in anger.

"It was a nice try, Satan. However, you... will regret it."

He would make Satan regret having enraged him and turning a Watcher of Light into an Undead...

Satan smirked.

[Enough of this trivial play, Raphael.]

"..."

[Come. I will not run or hide.]

Satan stood up.

[I will declare here and now...]

Immense darkness spread like a tent in the scene of the footage.

[I will shroud all light in darkness!! I will destroy all of the worlds! Remember my name, puny beings!]

"N-No!! This isn't it!!!" Julia shouted anxiously.

She quickly reached out toward the black crystal orb, but Kang-Woo acted first and kicked her. Bash.

"KYAA!!"

Julia was pushed back.

Kang-Woo glared at her with a sharp gaze and rebuked, "How dare you try to make excuses?"

"A-Aaaahh," Julia uttered with a pale face.

Kang-Woo raised his hand.

'Authority of Coloring.'

He created a sword that let off a brilliant golden light.

Del Lain—it was the Sword of the Sun that Tirion, God of Heroes, had left him.

"Those tainted by darkness..."

He raised the golden sword and...

"Receive the judgment of light."

He swung it down.

Slash!!

Julia's bandage-covered head was severed from her body, falling onto the floor and rolling away from her body.

"Hyung-nim... This is...."

Si-Hun walked toward him.

Kang-Woo turned around to face Si-Hun.

"I told you," he said, grabbing Si-Hun's shoulders. "The truth... will never die."

Intense, golden light enveloped Kang-Woo.

\* \* \*

- Come. I will not run or hide.

[No... This isn't it.]

The footage was displayed in a dark cave.

Satan trembled as he watched it.

- I will declare here and now...

[What in the world...]

- I will shroud all light in darkness!! I will destroy all of the worlds! Remember my name, puny beings!

[A-Aaaahh.]

The voice that flowed out from the video belonged to a being that looked and sounded like him but wasn't him.

Satan groaned, [Stop. Stop... please.]

- I am death. I am the end. I am the father of all wrath, and I am wrath itself.

[Please, stop...]

- I am Satan.

[A-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!!] Satan let out a desperate scream. [Stop him!!!]

BOOM!

The giant thirty-meter-wide sphere warped, and the cave shook as if it were about to collapse.

[Stop that crazy son of a bitch right now!!!]

Chapter 233 - The Truth Will Never Die (5)

BOOM!

An explosion rang out right after Satan finished speaking.

Raphael frowned and asked, "What happened?"

"W-We are being attacked!"

"Is it Satan's retainers?"

The Watcher of Light nodded.

Some of Satan's retainers, who had been surrounding the fortress, finally made their appearance.

Rumble!

"Ah! A-Already?!"

Magic poured in from all over.

The angels' base was the size of a fortress, but the construction was still in progress. So, it did not have the defensive capabilities to block the barrage of magic attacks.

BOOM!

A huge crack appeared on the ceiling, and white stones fell.

Raphael quickly raised his sacred spear, emitting light that deflected all of the rocks. However...

"Ah..."

One of the fragments, which was the size of an adult human, was deflected toward one of Raphael's subordinates. The priestess trembled in fear as the fragment flew at her at blinding speed.

Raphael reached for her.

Crack!

"Please be careful."

However, before Raphael could do anything, a young man with a piercing gaze and a golden sword pulled the priestess backward into safety. It was Oh Kang-Woo.

The stone fragment shattered over the floor.

The priestess hesitated for a moment before bowing and saying, "Th-Thank you... very much."

Kang-Woo walked past her and looked at Kim Si-Hun.

"Yes, hyung-nim," Si-Hun said.

He immediately raised his holy sword as if he knew what Kang-Woo intended to say.

Without a word more, the two of them quickly ran outside.

"Kuh! When did they prepare such forces...?!"

"Change the golem to battle mode!!"

Outside the fortress, Kang-Woo and Si-Hun saw the Watchers of Light and angels busily preparing for battle.

"This is an order from the Aspect of Evil!"

"Wipe them out!"

Demons and Demon Cultists had surrounded the angels' base, which was being destroyed by a barrage of magic. These were the forces that Satan had dispatched to find the demon king's clone.

"They've finally shown their true colors," Kang-Woo remarked while raising Del Lain.

"I will take the left side, hyung-nim," Si-Hun said.

Kang-Woo nodded.

As if they'd decided on it beforehand, Si-Hun and Kang-Woo each went to opposite sides.

'Let's see...'

Kang-Woo stomped on the ground and scanned the demons surrounding the base.

He clicked his tongue.

'Tsk, they're not even worth devouring.'

The team had obviously been formed at a moment's notice since the strongest demons that he could see were from the Fifth and Sixth Hells.

'They must've been in a hurry.'

There was no way that this was the Demon Cult's elite force. Satan had likely thought that he needed to stop the fake Satan before he did anything crazier.

'I mean, that was all I prepared, though.'

Kang-Woo turned his head.

The footage in the Mirror of Darkness had ended once Julia Vilkova died. Everything had gone as Kang-Woo had expected—no, it was better.

'I honestly didn't think it'd go this well.'

Kang-Woo wouldn't have even bothered showing up if he knew it would go so well. He had only appeared so that he could take care of the situation if Raphael reacted unexpectedly.

'I guess it wasn't necessary.'

Pre-recording the video as if they were talking hadn't been hard for him to do. After all, a conversation was all about flow.

Take for example a scenario in which a third party was listening in on a conversation between two people. However, the third party could only hear one of the two people, like listening to a friend speaking to someone over the phone. Nevertheless, the third party was more or less able to guess the subject and flow of the entire conversation just from hearing one side of it.

'Assuming the conversation is purely an exchange, that is.'

If that was the case, Kang-Woo just needed to use sentences that forced such an exchange. The problem had been with timing, but fortunately, it had not veered too far off from what Kang-Woo had expected from Raphael.

'The situation improved thanks to that.'

He had made it clear to Raphael that Oh Kang-Woo and Satan were two separate beings through this incident. He'd created a perfect alibi, just like when he'd attacked Guardians' secret vault.

With this, Raphael wouldn't even consider the possibility that Kang-Woo was Satan. The possibility itself had vanished from Raphael's mind, which was the best possible way to get Raphael to trust him.

"Nice."

A wicked smile appeared on Kang-Woo's face.

He walked forward as demons surrounded him, and he lightly swung his sword.

Slash!

"Kurgh!"

He cut the demons, and black blood spewed from their wounds.

"Execute the intruders!"

"Wipe out Satan's subordinates!"

Angels soon joined the battle.

Raphael was leading the charge. He swept away the demons like a raging bull with his immense, glowing spear.

Kang-Woo glanced at Raphael while casually killing some demons.

'He's strong.'

Breathtaking sacred power was pouring from Raphael as he swung his sacred spear. Comparing Ludwig's sacred power to Raphael's was like comparing a firefly to the sun.

'I guess they really have been accumulating their strength during the thousand years of war in Hell.'

Kang-Woo remembered what Lucifer's retainer had told him before. During the thousand-year war that had made the Nine Hells into a vortex of chaos, the angels had been silently amassing their strength.

'If he's that strong...'

A faint smile appeared on Kang-Woo's face.

'He should be more than capable of nullifying unexpected variables.'

Kang-Woo would have been troubled if such a powerful being were his enemy. Nonetheless, at this moment in time, angels were not his enemies. They were comrades as well as allies that would help him and Guardians fight and kill Satan, the Demon of Prophecy.

'It's too bad I'll have to give up on getting the sacred power, though.'

If Kang-Woo started collaborating with angels, he would have trouble accumulating sacred power.

Of course, he was able to use the Authority of Predation so that no one could see him do it. He could just make it seem like they had turned into dust and disappeared.

'But it's too dangerous.'

In any case, Kang-Woo couldn't do that in front of Raphael. He wasn't sure how strong Raphael was at the moment, but he didn't think such a trick would fool Raphael.

'I wonder who would win if we fought one-on-one.'

Kang-Woo had no idea. After all, he wasn't some martial arts master who could figure out the result of a battle without even fighting. All he knew was that it would not be an easy battle.

Crack.

"Kurgh! K-Kaarghh."

While Kang-Woo was facing a demon charging toward him, he suddenly heard something break. Then he saw a demon with four eyes, each one the size of a basketball, squirming in pain.

"Hm?" Kang-Woo murmured, tilting his head puzzledly.

He hadn't done anything to that demon yet.

"GRRR!!!"

The demon let out a beast-like growl and exuded chilling demonic.

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed. The demonic energy felt familiar.

'He must be Satan's Familiar.'

He smirked.

[You... bastaaaaaaaaard!!]

The demon's voice changed as it let out a scream of rage.

A mere demon from the Sixth Hell charged toward him at a surprisingly incredible speed.

'But...'

In the end, the demon was nothing but a Familiar. Satan had great power, but he couldn't be of any threat to Kang-Woo by controlling a Familiar from a long distance.

Crack.

Kang-Woo extended his hand and grabbed the demon's neck. The demon's four eyes had a mad look as they gazed at Kang-Woo.

[How... How dare you!]

"Satan," Kang-Woo smiled brightly. "Do you feel the madness?"

[...]

"Do you feel your reason flying away from the rage? Is your head getting hot? Is your vision blurring? Is your heart beating faster?"

[You son of a—]

"Ha, HAHAAHAHAHA!!" Kang-Woo laughed and twisted the neck of the demon that Satan was possessing.

"Do not forget that feeling, Satan," he said to the Prince of Wrath. "That is wrath."

[Raaaaaahhhhh!!] Satan let out an enraged scream. [I will kill you, demon king. I'll rip you into little pieces, killing you as horribly as possible!!]

"Give me your best shot."

'After all...'

"You can't beat me. You know... don't you?" Kang-Woo laughed. "Who I am?"

Crack.

Black blood poured out as Kang-Woo wrung the demon's neck like he would with a chicken's neck.

Then he turned his head and saw Si-Hun swinging the holy sword and Raphael massacring the demons. Watchers of Light and angels were supporting him.

The battle did not last long. The Demon Cult's forces had been nothing but an impromptu unit, so it had not even been a challenge to destroy them.

'Right, then.'

Kang-Woo began walking slowly.

After cleaning the blood off the holy sword, Si-Hun came running toward Kang-Woo and stuck right behind him.

'Are you a dog?'



Si-Hun was looking at him with sparkling eyes. Kang-Woo couldn't help but laugh at how trusting Si-Hun's eyes looked.

Then Kang-Woo turned back toward the front and walked toward his destination.

"..."

He saw Raphael standing blankly while holding his glowing spear.

"Ludwig was... a good person," Kang-Woo expressed.

"..."

"We are sorry for not being able to protect him," Kang-Woo apologized with a bow.

Raphael slowly turned his head toward Kang-Woo and said, "Ludwig is still in pain."

"..."

"Even after death, he wasn't able to go to Heaven. Both his soul and body have been corrupted and have fallen into the pit of despair."

Kang-Woo could see the sadness in Raphael's eyes.

"I will be honest." Raphael looked at Si-Hun and Kang-Woo. "I do not see Guardians in a good light. I regretted many times that I agreed to help Lord Uranus."

There was no way Raphael would see them in a good light since they had failed to do anything to stop Ludwig from experiencing such great suffering.

"But..."

Raphael trembled. Immense energy poured from him and devoured his surroundings.

"If it is for the sake of eradicating demons..."

The Demon of Prophecy, Satan...

If he could kill that cruel and evil demon...

"I will do whatever it takes."

He could endure the death of his beloved apostle.

Raphael walked toward Kang-Woo and Si-Hun. He looked at Kang-Woo, who had stepped up to save one of his apostles during the sudden attack.

Then he looked at Si-Hun, who had managed to inherit the holy sword, which had accepted no one but Ludwig. Raphael could instinctively tell that Si-Hun had been truly enraged by Ludwig's death.

"Can I ask you..." Raphael extended his hands. "...To lend me your strengths?"

There was a short silence.

Kang-Woo took a step forward and grabbed Raphael's hand.

"Of course."

Raphael and Kang-Woo... Angels and Guardians... Two lights joined as one.

An intensely bright light shone like it was burning, and although it was night, a brilliant radiance illuminated the vast wilderness.

#### Chapter 234 - All-Out War (1)

"...So something like that happened." Gaia nodded with a heavy expression on her face. "To think that Ludwig..."

She heard that Satan had taken Ludwig's corpse from the angels and turned it into an Undead, and that his soul was still suffering within the Undead.

Just imagining that made Gaia tremble in fear.

'If either Si-Hun or Kang-Woo fell into such a situation...'

"..."

She bit her lip.

She didn't even want to imagine it.

"We will save him," Kim Si-Hun said in a firm voice.

He clenched his fists.

Giving Ludwig eternal rest...

Although they'd known each other for a short time, he thought that was the least he could do for someone he called a 'friend.'

Gaia gave a faint smile.

"Okay. I will trust you, Protector Kim Si-Hun." She took a deep breath to calm her beating heart. She then said in a calm voice, "In any case, we were able to gain the cooperation of the angels thanks to Satan's mistake."

The matter with Ludwig was heart-wrenching, but looking at it objectively, they'd gained a lot thanks to it. They were able to make the angels stop suspecting Guardians and even collaborate with them.

Guardians had to face the Demon of Prophecy, Satan, no matter what, so that was certainly welcome news.

"Yes, but it isn't a collaboration in the truest sense. We suggested joint training, but Lord Raphael said that he and the angels would move on their own."

"Mm..." Gaia nodded. "That could be good news for us."

If they formed a full-fledged alliance, there could be disagreements over who would be in command.

Besides, Guardians also had separate groups for training. Grace McCubbin and Tian Wuchen led the main forces, and Si-Hun led the special forces, the Sirius Corps. Each of these forces trained separately.

With the possibility of an all-out war against the Demon Cult upon them, there was a chance that changing strategies would reduce their overall strength.

Fighting together but moving based on each side's judgment...

That was probably the best possible strategy at the moment.

"I guess you're right," Si-Hun replied.

"Kang-Woo, umm... Have you told Lord Raphael about you being..."

"I didn't tell him," Oh Kang-Woo answered.

"I guess you wouldn't."

Gaia nodded.

On the Day of Calamity, Kang-Woo had fallen into Hell and spent ten whole millennia there, turning him into a demon in the process.

Although there had been nothing that he could have done about it, there was no way that angels, who had strong hostility for demons, would understand his circumstances.

"I can't understand it," Si-Hun said while frowning.

Kang-Woo hadn't become a demon of his own volition. Not just that, he had cast aside his demonic energy and accepted the power of light.

'There's no one kinder and more righteous than hyung-nim.'

He couldn't help but feel frustration after seeing the hyung he loved and respected be chained to a past his hyung had no choice in.

"Well, I'm sure that what all the angels see is a demon," said Kang-Woo.

That was the case for Ludwig and Raphael—their hostility toward demons was honestly impressive. It was clear that they would eradicate all demons, no matter the demon's circumstances.

"Then..."

"Yes. I think you should be as careful as you can while mentioning anything about me, Balrog, and Lilith."

"Understood." Gaia nodded. As if it were difficult to understand, she asked, "By the way, had Lord Raphael not mentioned assistance from the other archangels?"

Angels were vigilant about the Demon of Prophecy, the being who would bring ruin to the entire world, so it was hard to understand why only Raphael had come to Earth and not the other archangels.

"I asked him that as well, but... he avoided answering."

Kang-Woo recalled his conversation with Raphael. He had said that it would be difficult for Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and the other archangels to join this war.

'I have no idea why, though.'

He wasn't sure what was more important than eliminating the Demon of Prophecy.

'Well, since we can't forcibly call them over, I guess this much should be enough.'

Rather, if more archangels participated, the plan could go awry.

Just Raphael was more than enough.

Kang-Woo said, "Then, please call back the Guardians members taking part in the restoration operation of South America and the Middle East."

"The war against the Demon Cult..."

"Yes. It will happen soon." Kang-Woo nodded with certainty.

"They'll make their move this time for sure."

Even if they had other reasons, they would not be able to sit idly by this time.

He'd heard from Lilith that there had been large movements in the Demon Cult's giant branch, so he was sure that an all-out war against them would take place soon.

"Okay. I will gather our forces in Africa where Lord Raphael's forces are—"

"No." Kang-Woo shook his head. "The war probably won't be taking place there."

Based on the Demon Cult's movements, which he had heard from Lilith, and where they had surmised Satan was hiding, there was only one place the war could take place.

"The war will likely take place in Russia."

The land of cold—a place covered with snow and ice. The chances of the final battle against the Demon Cult taking place there was the highest.

"Then, I will gather our forces in Russia. We should also add a few more Gates," Gaia said.

"In that case, I will train with the Sirius Corps to fight in the severe cold in advance," Si-Hun added.

Even if Players could surpass what was humanly possible, they couldn't go against the forces of nature. There were even cases of Players collapsing because they couldn't get used to the tropical climate of South America.

"In that case, I will request insulative gear from the Magic Tower."

The Magic Tower in Korea was like a factory that pumped out enormous amounts of magic items.

Basic insulative gear restricted the Players' movements too much. For example, imagine if a warrior specialized in agility fought while wearing arctic clothes. It would be a relief if they didn't roll around.

"Ah... Come to think of it, Khadgar filed a petition demanding a vacation." Gaia gave Kang-Woo a few documents.

He threw them in the trash without hesitation. "There is no such thing as vacations when fighting for world peace."

"But still..."

"Gaia." Kang-Woo gently grabbed her hand. "I'm sure Khadgar will understand. After all, we have no other choice."

"..."

Gaia nodded while making a troubled expression.

"We will soon be able to free Earth from Satan's clutches," Kang-Woo said and lightened up the mood with a bright smile.

He didn't know if it was really going to be the final battle. There were many secrets surrounding Satan, and he still didn't know everything about the Demon Cult yet.

Still, he was sure that this war would severely reduce the forces of the Demon Cult, which had been a nuisance to Players all around the world.

"Fufu. This day would have never come if it hadn't been for the both of you."

Gaia laughed lightly while covering her mouth.

She wasn't saying that to lift them up.

Kang-Woo and Si-Hun...

Those two, who had joined Guardians the latest, had become core members whom they couldn't do without.

"Thank you. Thank you both... so much."

Gaia bowed deeply.

Si-Hun tried to stop her in a panic.

"If you're so thankful, then why don't you show me you getting lovey-dovey with Si-Hun? You've already both realized your feelings for each other, haven't you," Kang-Woo said with a smirk.

"I... I beg your pardon?" Gaia's face reddened in bewilderment.

"Hyung-nim!!"

Si-Hun hurriedly ran toward him. Kang-Woo easily dodged Si-Hun's hands and patted him on the shoulder.

"I'll be able to feel relieved only after I see things work well for my little brother."

'And most importantly...'

He recalled when Si-Hun had challenged Balrog to a duel.

'Someone, please just take him.'

For some reason, he kept aiming to take the seat of the main heroine. He wished for Si-Hun and Gaia's love to blossom from the bottom of his heart.

'I'll be rooting for you, Gaia! Love and peace, from the bottom of my heart!'

He put his hands on Gaia's and Si-Hun's shoulders.

"Well then, I will stop bothering you two. I'll be counting on you two to finish up the strategy meeting and prepare for the coming war."

Love blossomed in the harshest of conditions.

He wished for the all-out war against the Demon Cult to greatly advance their relationship.

'Please.'

After patting them on the shoulders desperately, Kang-Woo turned around.

"Great job, Master Kang-Woo." Lilith, who had been standing by, followed him from behind.

Kang-Woo walked past her and asked, "Have you found out anything?"

He had commanded Lilith to focus entirely on the Demon Cult's movements rather than preparing for the upcoming war.

"First of all, movements in the Russian Demon Cult branch, the largest one we have found yet, have been detected."

"You already told me that last time."

The branch in Russia had more than ten thousand members.

"According to the cardinals we planted... two Aspects of Evil have arrived at the branch in Russia."

"Two? Satan and who?"

"No." She shook her head. "Satan has yet to show himself."

"Oh?"

Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'That means...'

Including Satan, at least three Aspects of Evil would be participating in this war.

'It must've been super effective.'

The rats that had been living in their little holes all this time were making their move all at once for some reason. It likely meant that they would put everything they had into this war.

'No wonder.'

Leaving aside whether he was the Demon of Prophecy or not, Satan had blatantly declared war on Raphael. He'd confidently said he would destroy all worlds, so it would be weirder if they had stayed hidden.

"What information do you have on the two?"

"I will show you photos."

Lilith snapped her finger, and a screen appeared.

Kang-Woo saw a human covered in bloody bandages and holding a rusty saber.

"Who is..."

"He is known as Crimson Fiend. Based on rumors... he seems to be from another world."

"Another world? Are you talking about Aernor?"

"No," Lilith answered while shaking her head. "I heard he is from the continent known as Huan."

"Oh... There."

He'd heard about that world during his conversation with Lucifer.

'I wonder what kind of world it is.'

Aernor gave the feeling of a fantasy world.

For some reason, he had a hunch that Huan would be like the worlds often seen in martial arts s.

'Is this a fucking trail mix or something?'

It was as if the author thought that it would be nice if all kinds of different settings were added.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue at the complacent setting of the universe.

'I wonder what it's like there.'

He couldn't tell. Unlike Aernor, which intermingled with Earth so much at this point that it practically felt like the next town over, there had been no interaction between Earth and Huan.

"And who's the other one?"

"Here it is."

She passed the screen as if it were a PowerPoint slide.

This time, someone Kang-Woo knew very well appeared.

"Belphegor."

The Prince of Sloth.

A purple-skinned demon about three meters tall was sitting in a wheelchair, and a demon that seemed to be his subordinate was pushing it.

'That son of a bitch still never gets off his ass.'

Belphegor was capable of moving. Not only were his two legs fully functional, he was actually extremely fast. Just like his title implied, he was just far too lazy to move around by himself.

'Lucky bastard.'

Kang-Woo's dream was to become a wealthy bum, so he couldn't help but feel envious of Belphegor's worry-free life.

"A prince of Hell..."

Kang-Woo opened his status window.

His Demonic Energy stat had been stuck at 140 for a while.

"Very nice."

He licked his lips.

Chapter 235 - All-Out War (2)

Darkness akin to black clouds flowed down from a high mountain and slid over a snow-covered field. The darkness devoured the sunlight, making the immediate area around the mountain seem like night.

The inside of the mountain, which should have been nothing but dirt and rocks, had been artificially hollowed out.

[Yawn.]

A demon, Belphegor, yawned while looking down at the people lined up.

He was sitting on a chair that looked like a wheelchair and frowned as if he didn't like what he was seeing.

[Why was the plan pushed up so much?]

One could feel the annoyance in his voice. He complained while lying in his chair as if he were too lazy to get up.

"I heard that something unforeseen had happened."

A low voice came from a man covered in bloody bandages—it was a voice as unpleasant as grating metal.

Belphegor looked at Crimson Fiend, the person standing next to him.

[Like what?]

"I heard that the demon king appeared."

Bam!!

Belphegor sprang up after hearing what he said.

[Wh-What?]

Crimson Fiend's eyes shone when Belphegor got up.

'Belphegor stood up?'

He'd never seen someone as lazy as Belphegor on the continent of Huan and Earth combined.

He always sat in a mobile chair because he was too lazy to move around despite having a perfectly working body. He also never took the time to listen to the reports that the apostles regularly gave him.

He had put off reconstructing his body back when only his soul was left within his Hell Armament, so it was not difficult to imagine how lazy he was. Belphegor was so lazy that he couldn't even be bothered to properly absorb the Demonic Origin that allowed one to acquire Divinity. Despite this, Belphegor had gotten up.

[That is... complete nonsense.]

Belphegor's face paled, and he trembled immensely. He looked so pathetic that one couldn't see the dignity of a prince of Hell. Fear had even echoed in his voice.

Crimson Fiend frowned.

"Is the demon king that strong?"

To be honest, he had almost heard nothing about the demon king after all the time he had been working with the Demon Cult. He had just heard that Satan, Belphegor, and Mammon had struggled against him in the past.

[Is he that strong? That strong, you ask?]



Belphegor laughed at the absurdity of Crimson Fiend's question.

"Is he not but a mere human in the end?"

Crimson Fiend had been a human before becoming a demon after learning the demonic arts, so he knew better than anyone else that a human body was fundamentally different from a demon body. He had to put forth painstaking effort to gain the power the demons had since birth.

'It took a very long time.'

He circulated the demonic energy inside his body.

To stand on the same ground as those who had been born with the destiny of being an absolute being called a 'prince of Hell,' he had to spend a thousand years practicing the demonic arts while absorbing the blood of tens of thousands of humans.

'But even still...'

He had not been able to surpass Satan—he hadn't been able to go beyond the innate limit of a human.

[A human... you say?]

Belphegor's eyes trembled.

He extended his hand and grabbed Crimson Fiend's collar.

[Listen well. He is a monster. A crazed monster!!]

A human?

Who would dare ignore the demon king just because he was a human?

No, to be honest, Belphegor had also ignored him at first.

Demon king... To be more precise, before the demon king had come to be known as that and when he had declared war against all princes, Belphegor had ignored him because he couldn't be bothered with it.

But then, all seven princes of Hell had lost.

They were all devoured by one monster.

[Aaaahh, how could this have... H-He died for sure! I felt it!!!]

He'd felt the demon king's energy vanish when he was torn apart by the dimensional wall.

Although his soul had been pathetically stuck in his Hell Armament at the time, Belphegor had clearly felt it. He had even been thrilled by the fact that he had finally been freed from that lunatic, but... he was alive?

[A-Aaaahh.]

Belphegor trembled in fear.

Crimson Fiend clicked his tongue while looking at him.

'He reminds me of a martial artist who has met the Heavenly Demon.'

Where he used to live in Huan, there was a being who ruled through immense fear.

The Heavenly Demon...

Those who met that being were devoured by fear and lost their minds, just like what was happening to Belphegor.

'The demon king is on par with the Heavenly Demon?'

Nonsense.

Crimson Fiend shook his head.

He had come across many rulers of Hell such as Satan, Belphegor, and Mammon since coming to Earth, but they were nothing compared to the Heavenly Demon.

He had been at the pinnacle of all those who practiced the demonic arts, and was like a god to them.

'No matter how strong this demon king is...'

There was no way he could compare to the Heavenly Demon.

Crimson Fiend had used a forbidden technique to travel to another dimension exactly because he was sure that he would never be able to become a ruler if he stayed in Huan.

'One day...'

His eyes began shining with madness.

He was following Satan's commands because he couldn't go beyond his limitations as a human at the moment, but he dreamed of killing them all and standing at the very top. For that dream, they needed to win this war at all costs.

[W-We have to run.]

"What?"

Crimson Fiend laughed in exasperation.

How strong was the demon king for Belphegor to react in such a way?

[I am going b—]

Clutch!!

Belphegor had turned around when, suddenly, a darkness spread and grabbed his shoulder.

Slam!

The darkness shoved Belphegor back into his chair.

A being wearing a red demon mask walked out of the flickering darkness shrouding him.

[Sit down, Belphegor.]

[Sa...tan...!]

Belphegor glared at the being wearing a red demon mask.

[What is going on?! The demon king is alive?! What nonsense is that?!] he screamed.

Satan put more strength into the hand gripping Belphegor's shoulder.

Rumble!!

The huge mountain shook.

[Kuh!]

Belphegor grunted in pain.

Satan's eyes gleamed with complexity, and he said, [I do not know either.]

[What...?]

[I do not know how the demon king is still alive,] he said in irritation.

The revival of the demon king...

They had not even calculated that variable into their plan after they had arrived on Earth and discovered the Demonic Origin. It was only natural, since the demon king had been torn to shreds by the dimensional wall.

One could safely pass the dimensional wall by creating a hole in the dimensional wall using the Hell Armaments, but Satan had ordered Amon to make it so that the demon king would collide head on with the 'providence of the universe' which managed the border between dimensions.

Even a god wouldn't have been able to survive that, but the demon king had managed to survive.

He hadn't died.

[...]

Silence fell.

[What are you planning to do now?] Belphegor asked in a low voice.

[We will have to fight,] Satan answered without hesitation.

BOOM.

Belphegor sprang up from his chair once again.

[Fight? Are you out of your mind, Satan?!]

[Do you have any other way?]

Satan glared at Belphegor with cold eyes.

There was no compromise with the demon king; they had learned that the hard way back in Hell during their thousand-year war.

The man was crazy, in every sense of the word.

[H-How about we let him in on our plan and—]

[You know that he thinks of us as nothing more than food. I am sure you know what happened to all seven of us princes of Hell.]

[But he never bares his teeth at his subordinates!]

[Are you suggesting that we become his subordinates?]

Satan narrowed his eyes. Becoming the demon king's subordinates was something that they couldn't bring themselves to do.

No matter how much they feared the demon king, they were still princes of Hell. The blood of a ruler had been flowing inside them since birth. They couldn't even fathom the idea of serving someone.

[Kuh...]

[Enough nonsense. We must kill him before the demon king restores his full power.]

[Full power?]

[I have investigated him.] Satan continued in a low voice, [Unlike us, it seems he had arrived on Earth only two years ago.]

[Two years...]

Belphegor's eyes shone sharply as if he knew what Satan was trying to say.

[He seems to have been raising his strength while concealing his identity among the humans.]

[Then that must mean...]

[Correct.] Satan nodded. [He lost his power when he collided with the dimensional wall, just like we had.]

[...]

Belphegor remained silent.

Crimson Fiend, who had been silently listening, joined the conversation.

"But angels will also be joining this war, are they not?"

[Raphael...]

The darkness surrounding Satan fluctuated.

Because of the demon king's manipulation, they could no longer avoid an all-out war against the angels. If things had gone according to their original plan, they would have faced the angels at least a few decades later.

[I have an idea.]

He thought of a way to face Raphael and kill the demon king at the same time. It would have been impossible before, but there was a possibility now.

Satan looked at the Demon Cultists, and demons lined up.

[That aside, where is Kalgia?]

"I do not know. He cannot be reached after he had gone somewhere to investigate the Demon of Prophecy."

[Again?] Satan shook his head. [Well... This should be enough for now.]

Kalgia wouldn't be of much help in a war anyway. He specialized in summoning and black magic; he was similar to Amon.

[Satan, will you really be able to kill the demon king?]

[Yes, if things go according to plan,] Satan said firmly. [And if we manage to kill him...]

[...]

Belphegor remained silent.

He gulped.

It wasn't hard to imagine what Satan wanted to say.

[We will be able to acquire... the Demonic Sea.]

[Exactly.]

Belphegor's eyes filled with greed.

It was a reward so sweet that it could erase his indolence.

[Alright, tell me the plan.]

Belphegor took a seat again. His greed-filled eyes gleamed.

'Two years...'

It was a short amount of time, even for a mortal human.

'We can do it.'

He thought that it was more than possible.

'It has only been two years.'

A very short amount of time.

'Even if it is that monster...'

There was no way he had fully restored his power in just two years.

Chapter 236 - How To Tame Light (1)

"That's a lot of people."

Oh Kang-Woo walked out of the barracks made for executives and looked at the allied forces made up of angels, Watchers of Light, and members of Guardians.

An endless snowstorm was raging over the mountain where the allied forces were located, and the weather was so harsh that the cold would instantly freeze urine before one's urine could even reach the ground.

Even if Players had superhuman bodies, they would obviously struggle in such weather, but there were no signs of them struggling as they ate their combat rations.

"We'll finally be able to finish off these Demon Cult bastards once and for all."

"We'll be able to return to our homes once this is over, right?"

"I've decided to marry Anna if I come back from this war alive."

"Smith..."

"Do your best. I'm sure you'll be able to survive!"

Not only were they not feeling cold, but they could even chitchat.

The mages of the Tower of Truth had officially become a mage corps directly under Guardians. Thanks to the equipment they'd made by sacrificing their vacation, Guardians members were able to brave the weather comfortably.

Kang-Woo's expression hardened when he heard their conversation.

'Smith... are you gonna be okay?'

No matter how anyone saw it, that was a death flag. While leaving the poor guy behind as he bragged about Anna, Kang-Woo entered the barracks again.

Gaia, Kim Si-Hun, Cha Yeon-Joo, Tian Wuchen, Han Seol-Ah, Echidna, and the other core members of Guardians were gathered.

"Ah, Kang-Woo." Han Seol-Ah walked toward him with a smile on her face. "The food is ready. Take a seat."

There was piping-hot kimchi stew in the middle of the meeting table.

Usually, they would have to eat combat rations, but they had abused their power as commanding officers to have a proper meal.

'You need to have a full stomach to fight well.'

Saliva started to gather in Kang-Woo's mouth.

"Thanks. I'm sure it was hard to make portions for all these people."

"Not at all. Echidna and Si-Hun helped me, so I barely did anything. I just taste-tested it."

"Hm! Kang-Woo, I learned how to make kimchi stew." Echidna snorted while smiling confidently.

Kang-Woo smirked and patted her head. Echidna rubbed her cheeks against his hand as if she were a cat.

He took a seat. In front of him was a bowl the size of a washbasin with kimchi stew in it.

Yeon-Joo looked at him in surprise.

"Do you like kimchi stew that much?"

"Of course. There's nothing in the world that can compare in taste."

Kimchi stew was life—it was perfect and worthy of worship.

Kang-Woo devoutly raised his chopsticks.

Yeon-Joo laughed in disbelief.

"I mean, it's not like kimchi stew is bad or anything, but..."

It honestly wasn't delicious enough to say it was the best food in the world.

From what she'd heard from Seol-Ah, Kang-Woo ate kimchi stew at least ten times a week and easily more than four to five portions. Even if one loved a certain food, it was fascinating that they would be able to eat so much of it.

'Well...'

Yeon-Joo grabbed her spoon and narrowed her eyes. She looked at Kang-Woo eating the kimchi stew.

'I guess... it's understandable.'

She thought of his past.

Ten millennia...

His desire had been built up for an unthinkable amount of time.

Considering that he had only thought of survival without being able to eat, drink, or enjoy anything, it was understandable.

'Well, if he likes it so much...'

Yeon-Joo coughed.

'Maybe I should make it for him too next time.'

She didn't have feelings for him, but considering how much help he'd given her, maybe it wasn't a bad idea. She hid her reddened cheeks and looked at Seol-Ah. Her mind was in jumbles.

Clack.

Kang-Woo paid no mind to Yeon-Joo's gaze and raised his bowl of rice.

First, he grabbed a long piece of kimchi and put it on his rice; then, he grabbed a piece of pork with a delicate balance of meat and fat and wrapped it in kimchi. He scooped up a large spoon of rice and put it into his mouth. The sour taste of kimchi and the pork juice spread over his tongue.

"Shieet...!"

His body tingled.

After repeating the process several times, he added some lukewarm water to the rice. He did not add a lot—just enough for the rice to become like porridge. He then ate the rice with the kimchi and meat.

A joyful taste spread through his mouth along with the rice, which had been cooled down to just the right temperature. Having kimchi stew with rice that had been mixed with lukewarm water reduced the kimchi's sour taste, allowing for a completely different wave of flavor.

"Phew. Thanks for the food."

"I prepared a little more than usual since I thought you would be tired from preparing for the battle."

"Thanks. Oh, I'll put the dishes away."

Kang-Woo got ready again after emptying his plate and washing all the dishes. He had more things to do.

"Oh, Seol-Ah, Could you make some more kimchi stew? A lot. Enough to feed about a hundred people."

"... For yourself?"

"No, I'm gonna take it to some people."

Seol-Ah tilted her head, but she soon got to preparing more kimchi stew with help from Kang-Woo, Echidna, and Si-Hun.

Kang-Woo had stockpiled a lot of ingredients before they had begun their war preparations, so they had more than enough ingredients.

He then poured the completed kimchi stew into several pots and put them all in a box. He kept the contents of the box warm with insulation magic and then got up.

"I'll be right back."

He easily lifted the box containing a hundred portions of kimchi stew and headed to the base of the angels some distance from the Guardians base. The Watchers of Light guarding the base looked very haggard.

They were not suffering from the cold; it seemed they'd also made preparations against the weather. There was only one reason why they looked so haggard.

'I knew it.'

Kang-Woo looked around and saw that the Watchers of Light were eating some unknown soup. The Watchers of Light were the only ones eating; the angels were each doing maintenance on their weapons and talking about the war against the demons that would soon take place.

"What brings you here?"

An angel with six wings walked toward Kang-Woo. The armor he wore was more luxurious than what the other angels had. Not only that, but he had more wings than the others as well. The light shining from him was also on another level.

The angel with short silver hair introduced himself: "I am Lord Raphael's loyal servant, Shalgiel."

Shalgiel was not looking at Kang-Woo very kindly. It wasn't just him; all the other Watchers of Light and angels were giving him a similar look. Although they'd decided to form an alliance at Raphael's command, they still had animosity toward Guardians.

'This won't do.'

The battle against the Demon Cult was going to take place soon, so the remaining conflict with Raphael's forces would pose problems.

Conflict gave rise to distrust, which amplified doubt. If that happened...

'I won't be able to make use of them.'

The role the angels had in the war was very important.

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

'I'd guess he's Raphael's right-hand man.'

That seemed to be the case based on how he was acting.

Kang-Woo put down the giant box containing kimchi stew.



Shalgiel began, "What is..."

"It is kimchi stew."

"Kimchi stew?" Shalgiel frowned in confusion.

"I took some glances at the angels and Watchers of Light over the past few days... and it seemed like they needed this."

"We are fine. We do not need food."

"That is only the case for angels," Kang-Woo said firmly. He then raised his hand and pointed to the Watchers of Light. "Can you not see them? Why do you think they look so haggard?"

"Because they feel sorrow and rage due to Ludwig's dea—"

"I am sure that is also the case, but this is the biggest reason."

He lifted the lid of one of the pots containing kimchi stew.

The eyes of the Watchers of Light shone as they smelled it.

"Ah..." Shalgiel expressed, seeing the Watchers of Light.

"Humans need to eat."

"We know that. That is why we also prepared f—"

"That can barely be called food."

Shalgiel closed his mouth at Kang-Woo's words and made a troubled expression as if he couldn't understand Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

'I knew this would happen.'

Just like demons, angels did not require sustenance.

Thanks to that, they didn't understand how important food was to humans.

It was only natural. Just like how humans did not know the sensation of flapping wings, angels did not know how hunger felt. They couldn't understand how important taste was to humans. There was no way a human could be sated by cheap oatmeal. If that were enough, the concept of cooking would've never been born.

Humans subconsciously yearned for delicious food.

'But...'

The Watchers of Light in Raphael's camp were devotees who served angels; the hierarchy was clearly defined. There was no way a private could complain to a sergeant about the army's food. The Watchers of Light remained silent, and they had slowly become haggard until they ended up like this.

'I wonder how they usually spend their days.'

When the Watchers of Light arrived on Earth, they looked normal. On Aernor, they likely went to have delicious and nutritious meals without needing to go out of their way to report to the angels

about it. But now that they were in another world, there was no way that they could acquire food on their own.

"..."

Shalgiel remained silent. He seemed surprised and confused. He quickly turned his head to look at the priests.

They hurriedly spoke.

"N-No!"

"Oatmeal is more than enough!"

"How could we have a greed for food as beings who serve the light?"

Although everyone denied it, it was clear to Shalgiel that they were just giving excuses.

Shalgiel nodded. "I see. It seems that I have not accommodated the Watchers of Light well enough."

After hearing his answer, the Watchers of Light walked toward Kang-Woo angrily.

"How dare you make such accusations!"

"We are beings that serve the light. We do not need food from a world like—"

Clack.

Kang-Woo opened the lid as soon as the Watchers of Light came to him to complain. The delicious scent overwhelmed their sense of smell.

"A-A world like..."

Their expressions hardened.

"Everyone." Kang-Woo smiled brightly. "You can have as much as you like. Even Lord Shalgiel has mentioned that he has not accommodated you all well enough, hasn't he?"

"W-We cannot..."

"A soup as red as blood... W-We cannot eat something like this!" the apostles shouted.

"Now, now. Don't be like that and give it a try," Kang-Woo said cordially.

"Guh..."

"You can always choose not to after you try just a sip."

His words were as sweet and tempting as a demon's, but the apostles couldn't reject them.

After all, they hadn't been able to eat a proper meal since their arrival on Earth almost a month ago.

"..."

The apostles looked at each other, and then one finally took a step forward.

He grabbed a spoon and tried some rice and kimchi stew.

"G-Gasp!!" His eyes widened. "Dear heavens... I-It's so...!!!"

The apostle trembled in excitement.

Although it was true that Seol-Ah was a great cook, she wasn't good enough for someone to react like this. Rather than the stew being that good, it was more that their situation was that dire.

They hadn't been able to eat proper food in over a month because of the angels, so anything would've tasted great to them.

"It is an Earth dish known as kimchi stew."

"Wow!!

"Kimchi stew...!"

The apostles quickly began devouring the kimchi stew.

As their empty stomachs filled, the looks in their eyes started to change.

"Ahem."

"We apologize for acting that way earlier. We were disrespectful to an ally whom we would be fighting alongside..."

Just from their stomachs being filled, their previous resentment toward Kang-Woo and Guardians had changed to gazes of trust.

"Hmm."

"What sort of dish could it be...?"

Even angels began wondering about the kimchi stew and started trying it. The spicy flavor stimulated the weak taste buds of the angels, surprising them as they ate the kimchi stew.

"We will share our rations with you until the war against the Demon Cult begins."

"Ah..."

Shalgiel's face reddened, as he had also been eating the kimchi stew out of curiosity.

"Thank you. It seems... I was mistaken about Guardians."

Their animosity started to melt down.

Kang-Woo smiled while looking at the angels and priests.

'As I thought, there's nothing like kimchi stew to gain someone's trust.'

Kang-Woo nodded while making a proud expression.

Chapter 237 - Who Dares To Judge Me? (1)

About ten thousand people were walking down a snowfield toward a mountainous peak.

They were Guardians—the last hope of humanity.

Elite players from all around the world were starting to move toward what they believed to be the Demon Cult headquarters. The closer they got to the war starting, the darker their expressions became.

They recalled their last battle against the Demon Cult in Tibet.

They'd underestimated the strength of demons, so they'd suffered great despair once faced with reality.

It was true that they'd gotten stronger through the experience of recovering territories lost to monsters, but still, the war felt different.

It was obvious. After all, they were moving to fight against the Demon of Prophecy—someone who was trying to destroy the world.

Thankfully, no one had deserted.

Lots of conversations were exchanged, and everyone was feeling a huge mix of emotions, but time still went on.

"This place is..."

"The Demon Cult headquarters."

Guardians members nervously looked up at the tall mountain.

To be precise, this was not the Demon Cult headquarters; it was only the largest branch that they had witnessed. Regardless, after Satan gathered his forces at this branch, it had practically become no different from their headquarters. There were estimated to be more than ten thousand cultists within, even more if the demons that they had summoned were included.

"All forces, prepare for battle!" the young man standing in the front, Kim Si-Hun, shouted. His voice, which he had amplified through Qi, echoed throughout the mountain.

The Guardians members nervously gripped their weapons.

"D-Demons!" shouted one of the Guardians members who had a long-range vision ability.

Everyone looked toward where the member had pointed.

'There's so fucking many of them,' Kang-Woo thought.

There were huge artificial doors located all around the mountain. As those giant doors opened, an enormous number of cultists and demons appeared.

'I'd say there are about twenty thousand.'

There were more demons than expected.

Kang-Woo grimaced as he looked up at the Demon Cult forces, which had the high ground.

"GRRRRRR."

"KIIIEKK!!"

The hideous demons interspersed among the cultists let out chilling battle cries.

There was a demon with dozens of eyes, a demon with snakes for hair, and a demon whose internal organs were fully visible due to its body having been detached into two halves. It was as if they had chosen the most hideous-looking demons to stand at the forefront.

"Gasp."

"Wh-What the hell?"

"They didn't look that bad before..."

The Demon Cult's plan worked; the Guardians members faltered when they saw the hideous demons.

"Get a hold of yourselves! Do not be misled by their appearance!" Si-Hun said in a firm voice.

That was easier said than done.

Sight was the sense that humans relied on the most. It was hard to stay calm when faced with such horrifying demons. The demons' appearance alone was nauseating.

On top of that...

"Wh-What is that smell?"

"Eek!"

"Urpp, bleeeegh!"

The agitation spread across the forces like a plague. A horrible scent, carried by the wind, spread across the entire area. It was the stench of rotten pus. It was hard to withstand, even for those who were used to fighting monsters.

"Haap!" Tian Wuchen shouted while stomping on the ground.

BOOM.

The Players in chaos slightly returned to their senses.

"Focus! Do you want your last moments to be filled with vomit?!"

The players gulped at Wuchen's words.

"KIIEEKK!!"

"Wipe out the filthy servants of light!"

The cultists finally made their move. A priest wearing a black robe was directing the demons at the forefront.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and looked through their forces.

'The Aspects have yet to make their move.'

He could not see a single demon the level of a prince of Hell among the massive wave of demons.

Kang-Woo wasn't at the front but at the rear.

His job wasn't to command the forces but to face demons that reached the level of a prince of Hell—demons that couldn't be beaten with just numbers.

Kang-Woo looked across the battlefield.

"Gwoooooo!!"

BOOM!!

Screaming, a giant demon that was dozens of meters tall swung down its club. A magic circle shone where it swung its club, and a huge explosion blasted out.

Crack!

BOOM!

Snow cascaded down in ever-increasing amounts along with a sound of something breaking.

An avalanche.

Si-Hun raised his sword.

"Tear the scrolls!!"

While preparing for war in a snowy environment, they had already expected the possibility of an avalanche being used against them. A flame barrier was created to protect the entirety of Guardians, which was about ten thousand in number.

"Arghh!"

"Sh-Shit!"

Of course, a few members who were just barely outside the barrier's range were taken by the avalanche.

Si-Hun stomped, sparing a glance at the soldiers being swept away by the avalanche.

"Advance!"

Si-Hun's scream announced the start of the battle.

The players quickly ran up the snow-covered mountain.

The Demon Cult forces took out their weapons and charged down the mountain in response.

The war started in earnest.

Slash!

"Blue Dragon Rampage!"

Si-Hun swung his sword while shouting the technique's name on purpose—it was a tactic they had prepared beforehand.

Dozens of sword energies spread from him and cut through the demons.

The picturesque young man massacred the demons, raising the morale of Guardians.

"Kill them!!"

"Filthy bastards!"

The clash between the Players and the Demon Cult truly began.

"Servants of light."

Raphael took a step forward while glaring at the demons. He raised his hand, and light gathered around it, creating a long spear.

"Those tainted by darkness..."

BOOM.

He aggressively stomped on the ground, and his eight wings extended outward.

"Receive the judgment of light."

"Judgment of light!!!!"

The angels spread their wings and soared into the sky, rushing down toward the demons clashing with Guardians' forces.

The clash between angels and demons, the servants of light and darkness; a giant and majestic battle straight out of legends was occurring right before their very eyes.

BOOM!

Fwoosh!

"Argh!!"

"DIIEE!"

Casualties piled up on both sides.

Although the Demon Cult had the advantage in number, Guardians had individuals far stronger than the demons.

Si-Hun and the Sirius Corps swept through the Demon Cult's forces, destroying their formations.

'He's doing a great job.'

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction as he looked at Si-Hun.

The demons were being pushed back thanks to Si-Hun and the Sirius Corps.

'As long as we keep this up...'

He licked his lips and sharpened his gaze.

'They'll have no choice but to come out.'

Numbers didn't matter when facing a prince of Hell, but if two beings of prince level fought and one of them had an army to back them up, that changed things.

The princes of Hell were not invincible; even if the attacks were weak and could barely scratch them, they wouldn't be able to ignore it as the damage accumulated, and the side that possessed the weaker force would lose.

The princes of Hell would definitely appear before their forces were wiped out.

"Now, it's time for you guys to get off of your fat a—"

Just then, he saw something strange.

Kang-Woo frowned.

"... What the hell's up with them?"

About five hundred cultists had thrown away the black robes and were stark naked.

They raised their hands into the sky as they knelt on the ground.

"O darkness, grant us your blessing!!"

"Bring ruin to the light!!"

Their madness-filled voices spread through the battlefield, garnering the attention of Guardians' forces, and...

Crack!!

Their flesh tore apart, and their intestines spewed out of their bodies and pooled on the ground along with their brains.

It was a horrible and disgusting scene.

Their corpses blended together, and black demonic energy rose up to link the five hundred corpses, giving rise to a giant monster.

"Graaaaaaahhh!!!!"

It was a monster with red skin.

Kang-Woo frowned.

"A Barbatos."

It wasn't an ancient demonic beast like the Halcyons that possessed intelligence, but it was still a demonic beast from the Ninth Hell.

Usually, demonic beasts didn't leave their habitat, but a Barbatos was an exception—it was notorious for roaming around and attacking anything in sight, whether it be a demon or a demonic beast.

"Fuck..."

A curse left Kang-Woo's mouth.

The Barbatos had a certain characteristic.

'I'm seriously about to hurl.'

Its body was made of corpses, and every time it moved, yellow pus poured down like a waterfall.

A horrible odor filled the battlefield.

"Blegh!!!"

"Wh-What is that?"

"Urp! Bleeeeeegh!!"

'Man...'

It was a bad matchup.

The Guardians members were puking from the hideous appearance and the horrific stench of the demonic beast they had never seen before.

On top of that, demonic beasts were far stronger than demons in terms of physical strength.

Kang-Woo extended his hand and pulled a golden sword from nothingness.

He couldn't afford to stand around doing nothing as it rampaged.



BOOM.

"What a disgusting monster."

Raphael stepped up with a radiant spear in his hand as if he had thought the exact same thing as Kang-Woo.

An archangel emitting a brilliant light joined the battlefield along with the apostle of the God of Heroes.

"Huh?"

"Wow!"

The Guardians members' eyes widened at the sudden appearance of light.

The expressions of the angels and Watchers of Light brightened.

"Those tainted by darkness..."

"Those tainted by darkness..."

Kang-Woo and Raphael—two heroes, one emitting a golden light and the other a pure-white light—opened their mouths together.

"Receive the judgment of light!"

Slam!!

Kang-Woo stomped on the ground.

Raphael flew into the sky.

Del Lain crushed the Barbatos's head, and the spear of light pierced its body.

The vigorous Barbatos died instantly.

[You have finally appeared.]

A black Rift appeared from the Barbatos's corpse, darkness flowing from it. A red demon mask appeared from the shroud of darkness.

"Satan."

Kang-Woo raised his sword.

"I have come to judge you."

[You son of a...! Fuuu, fuuu.]

Satan's voice trembled after he saw Kang-Woo.

He tried his best to calm down, but it was difficult.

[Raphael!] Satan shouted. [Do you know that the man standing next to you is the demon king wearing a mask of mischief?!]

Before Raphael could say anything, Kang-Woo said in a tired voice, "There you go again with your lies."

BOOM!!

He aggressively stomped on the ground and glared at Satan.

"Satan!! Your evil acts have been exposed for the whole world to see!"

[What? You son of a—]

"I have not forgotten! We have not forgotten! You killed Protector Alec and Reynald, the successor of the God of Heroes!!"

[Alec? Rey... What? Who are they?]

"You bared your teeth against other demons and used them to satiate your horrible desires to fill the Demonic Sea!!"

[No, you're the one with the Demonic S—]

"You corrupted Saint Ludwig and are trying to commit the brutality of breaking his cycle of life!!"

[You crazy bastard!! I bet you were the one who corrupted Ludwig!!] Satan screamed. [I do not know who these Alec and Reynald people are!! I had not even been aware that the Watchers of Light had been on Earth!! Listen to me, Raphael!! This was all done by him. He planned all of—]

"Shut up, Satan!"

Rumble!!!

The mountain shook from Kang-Woo's rage, and a brilliant golden light filled the area as if the sun itself had descended on Earth.

The Watchers of Light couldn't help but kneel at such a magnificent sight, tears flowing from their eyes.

After interacting with Guardians, they learned about Kang-Woo's true identity as an apostle of Tirion, God of Heroes—a light that eradicated darkness.

As if proving that, Kang-Woo was emanating light with sacred power mixed within it.

Kang-Woo raised Del Lain.

"How dare you insult me! How dare you doubt me?! How dare you judge me!!"

'I am justice!'

Chapter 238 - I'm Rooting for Both of You (1)

[You son of a...]

Satan couldn't properly form words due to his rage.

The darkness flickered.

He turned to check the expressions of Raphael and the Watchers of Light.

'Shit.'

They didn't look like they believed Satan at all. They were looking at Kang-Woo with eyes filled with deep trust.

[Hah...] Satan feigned laughter.

Gaining the trust of angels was no easy task.

Angels were so stubborn and inflexible that one would die of frustration trying to deal with them.

'How did he gain their trust?'

Satan couldn't understand it.

Raphael and his angels had not seen Guardians in a positive light.

Although their doubt toward Guardians had been eliminated due to the demon king's play, it did not change the fact that they had been unable to keep Ludwig safe.

'Despite that...'

The angels and the Watchers of Light were looking at Kang-Woo as if he were a comrade with whom they had gone through thick and thin.

No, they also seemed to have some loyalty toward him, albeit a bit of a stretch.

Anyway, it didn't change the fact that it was abnormal.

"Sataaaaaan!!"

Raphael spread his eight wings.

Satan grimaced.

'I have no choice.'

No matter what he did, he wouldn't be able to make Raphael doubt the demon king instead of him.

Satan raised his hand, and the darkness fluctuated like a wave and took the form of a pitch-black sword in his hand.

It was Wrath, the Hell Armament that represented him.

"Receive the judgment of light!"

Raphael threw his spear made of bright, white light.

Satan raised his pitch-black sword and blocked the attack.

Rumble!!!

Light and dark clashed, and a huge impact shook the surroundings.

An intense battle was occurring in the middle of a snowstorm that made it hard to see what was going on, and the ferocity of their battle split the earth.

[You dumbass...!] Satan said in anger.

The stupid angel was being played by the demon king, and just watching it made Satan feel sick.

Satan pulled his arm back, and darkness gathered around the pitch-black sword. He swung the sword upward.

Crack!!!

The ground distorted, and darkness soared from the ground like a fountain.

Raphael spun his spear like a windmill and blocked the darkness, and then they clashed once again.  
An ear-splitting sound shook the battlefield.

[Haaa.]

Satan's eyes were shining with madness. Now that it had come this far, he could not keep dodging. He could not keep taking it lying down. He had to brace his resolve and bloodlust.

He looked at the demon king wearing the disgusting mask of mischief and bathing in golden light.

"That is 'Wrath.'"

Satan heard the demon king's voice in his memories. His mocking gaze and cackle filled his head.

'How dare you...'

The demon king had dared to say such a thing to the Prince of Wrath of all beings. Wrath encroached upon Satan. His head became hot, and the blazing heat wrapped his entire body. Behind the red demon mask, Satan's eyes turned black. His irises turned yellow, and his pupils stretched horizontally.

[Very well,] he said in a voice filled with madness.

He gripped Wrath with both hands and swung it down on the ground.

[Let us kill each other, demon king.]

An explosion sounded. The crack in the ground that had formed during the clashes with Raphael widened even more. Mounds of dirt scattered into the wind, and huge pillars of rock jutted from the crevice as if they were thorns. And...

WHOOM.

It sounded as if nature itself was screaming.

A second landslide occurred, and it quickly grew in size. Satan raised his sword while looking down at the collapsing mountain.

Bat-like wings unfurled, and he flew into the sky.

'Demon king.'

He glared at the demon king with deep, sunken eyes, and then he looked down at the giant black gem he was holding. The gem was a fragment of the Demonic Origin that he'd brought with him. He had not intended to face both the demon king and Raphael at the same time without a plan.

'If I use this...'

He had more than a chance to emerge victorious as long as he used the Divinity stored within the Demonic Origin.

Satan's eyes shone.

[Come!] he shouted as he raised his pitch-black sword.

\* \* \*

"No, you fucker," Kang-Woo said as he smirked.

'He still hasn't graduated from his chuunibyou.'

He crossed his arms and watched from a distance as Raphael rushed toward Satan. Satan and Raphael clashed with each other.

'Not yet.'

There was no reason for Kang-Woo to make his move yet.

Of course, collaborating with Raphael and fighting against Satan could be good because it was obvious that two-on-one was better than one-on-one. However...

"This is the better option to avoid getting hurt."

Kang-Woo laughed. He already knew who Satan would primarily target if he joined the battle. Satan's rage would obviously be directed toward him, and Satan would prioritize attacking him instead of Raphael.

If that happened...

He and Satan would be the only ones getting hurt.

'That won't do.'

Everything had to be within the palm of his hand. He had to be able to control everything. He had to consider the worst-case scenario that Satan had become stronger than he had been in the Nine Hells and that there was a possibility of Satan severely wounding him if they fought.

'There's also the possibility of Raphael betraying me.'

The chances of that happening were low.

Raphael hadn't been able to sense the demonic energy that Kang-Woo had hidden using the Ruler of Demonic Energy Trait. It didn't seem like Raphael fully trusted him, but Raphael at least did not think that he was a demon.

'But still, you never know.'

What if Raphael realized his identity in the middle of the battle?

What if he attacked his wounded self?

As long as Kang-Woo was a demon and possessed the Demonic Sea, Kang-Woo wouldn't be able to fully trust an archangel.

'On top of that...'

He narrowed his eyes and recalled how Satan had shouted confidently at Raphael and him to come at him.

'He must have something up his sleeve.'

Satan wouldn't be so confident if he didn't have a trump card, and Kang-Woo wouldn't allow himself to be the victim of that card.

If someone was to be the victim, it had to be Raphael.

"Right, knock yourselves out."

Kang-Woo smiled brightly.

None of the countless Authorities he had allowed him to see the future, so he could only take every single variable into account, always assume the worst, and imagine failure. And...

'To always play the winning card.'

He didn't care who won the fight.

If Satan killed Raphael, the archangel that Kang-Woo couldn't trust would be eliminated.

If Raphael killed Satan, Kang-Woo could take measures to deal with the situation based on his reactions.

He had done the same thing when Lucifer fought against the Demon Cult.

He had no reason to take action himself.

'Solving everything with my own strength is stupid.'

It was something only a dumb person would do.

It would be a different story if there was no other way, but right now, an easy and comfortable path existed for him to take. There was absolutely no reason for him to suffer for no reason when doing nothing would take him more than halfway to the finish line.

'I guess I'll take this time to come up with a good excuse.'

Raphael might ask Kang-Woo what the hell he had been doing while he himself had been battling Satan, so he just had to prepare a suitable answer. It was actually not a difficult question to answer.

'Belphegor and some guy called Crimson Fiend are here, too'

Although they hadn't appeared yet, he could make use of them.

"Now, then."

There was one thing he had to do.

'Authority of Coloring.'

Kang-Woo used the Authority of Coloring to create light sticks that he stuck between his fingers and swung vigorously.

'Hurray! Hurray!'[1]

Raphael oppaaaaaaaa!

Satan oppaaaaaaaa!

'I'm rooting for both of you!'

\* \* \*

A spear of light chased Satan. He swung his pitch-black sword, letting out a wave of black demonic energy along the sword's trajectory.

'Why?'

He panted heavily.

Satan deflected Raphael's attack while making a confused expression.

Although he was fighting against Raphael, his mind was focused somewhere else.

'Why isn't he coming?'

The demon king was not participating in the battle.

He thought that the battle would take a two-on-one format, and he was expecting Raphael and the demon king to attack him simultaneously, so obviously, he'd prepared a strategy based on that.

'But why isn't he coming?'

Wham!

The pitch-black sword collided with the spear.

Satan pulled his hand back and swung his sword downward. A blade of demonic energy gathered and compressed along the trajectory of Wrath's blade.

'Authority of Extinction.'

Satan's Authority tore anything it touched into shreds. He had imbued the blade of demonic energy, which had just shot out, with this Authority.

"It is no use!"

Raphael pulled his spear back, throwing the spear while putting his foot forward as if stepping on air.

Thousands of illusions appeared around the spear as it flew. No, they weren't illusions. Thousands of spears made of light were gathering in a circle.

BOOM!!

The blade and spears clashed, and explosive sounds filled the sky as if thousands of bolts of lightning fell. The huge impact swept everything away, and the dark clouds that were spewing out a blizzard were blown away.

The sunlight shone down on them.

[Shit, shit!] Curses left Satan's mouth. His plan had been ruined.

He felt the Demonic Origin he had carefully placed in his bosom.

He needed to have both the demon king and Raphael within range. He still couldn't fully control the power of the Demonic Origin, so he didn't have many chances.

A trump card was called a trump card for a reason. If he could freely use it, he would've done so from the beginning.

'But...'

Kang-Woo wasn't coming.

No matter how long he waited while battling Raphael, he was not coming.

[Come, demon king!!] he screamed. [Fight me!!]

Why was the demon king not trying to finish him off after driving him into a corner?

Satan thought he was about to go crazy.

BOOM!!

[Raphael! Where is the demon king?!]

"You have lost your mind."

Raphael clicked his tongue.

Demon king?

What nonsense was that?

"You are the demon king."

His eyes shone sharply.

The Demon of Prophecy—the possessor of the Demonic Sea and master of 666 different Authorities.

If such a demon wasn't the demon king, then who could it possibly be?

[Shit! Oh Kang-Woo! Where is that son of a bitch?!]

"Did you think I would need a human to aid me in fighting you?"

Raphael laughed in disbelief.

He knew that the human Oh Kang-Woo had inherited the power of Tirion, God of Heroes, but that didn't mean an archangel should expect a human's help in fighting a demon.

"I will avenge Ludwig's death with my own hands!" Raphael shouted.

[For fuck's sake.]

Satan thought he was about to go crazy. He didn't even know what Ludwig looked like.

'Where are you, demon king?'

Satan hurriedly looked around for the demon king.

At that moment, he saw an eye-catching light. He saw the demon king looking up at them from within the debris of collapsed rocks.

[Th-Th-Th-Th-That son of a bitch...!]

The demon king was waving neon light sticks and excitedly watching their battle. He was hiding in a safe place after instigating the battle between him and Raphael.

[Th-That scumbag... How dare you—!!]

His rage had crossed the threshold.

Satan grabbed the back of his neck.

[Urgh.]

For a moment, his sight became blurry, and he felt like everything was spinning. Satan collapsed.

Chapter 239 - You're Not Ready Yet



"Argh!!"

"Kurgh!"

A giant wave of snow and dirt swept the Players away.

Kim Si-Hun quickly raised his sword and shouted hurriedly, "Use the second scroll!"

A translucent barrier surrounded the Players as they used their second scroll, but it wasn't as effective as the flame barrier that they had used first.

The translucent barrier was destroyed, and some Players were swept away by the avalanche.

"Shit!"

Si-Hun turned his head and saw that the second avalanche had just hit them. They'd already used the flame barrier, so many people were wounded by the avalanche.

"He doesn't care about his subordinates in the slightest."

Si-Hun bit his lips.

Unlike with the first avalanche, it wasn't just the Guardians members who were affected by the second avalanche. The Demon Cultists who had no scrolls to protect themselves with ended up suffering more than Guardians.

Si-Hun watched the Demon Cultists get swept away by the falling dirt, rocks, and snow.

"ARGH!"

"H-Help me!!"

Then Si-Hun's eyes widened when he realized where the avalanche was heading.

"That's..."

It was the place where the rearguard of Guardians was. They were in charge of healing the wounded as well as commanding the forces.

Furthermore...

"Gaia...!"

That was where Gaia was.

Si-Hun fell into chaos, and his mind went blank.

- Get it together, man.

He heard Oh Kang-Woo's voice at that moment.

It wasn't his real voice; it was an illusion or Si-Hun trying to hypnotize himself.

Si-Hun took a deep breath and analyzed the situation calmly.

'I have to stop it.'

He had to stop the avalanche before it reached the rearguard.

'But...'

How could a human stand against a natural disaster?

There was a huge difference between causing a natural disaster and stopping it. An avalanche could be easily triggered with an explosion, but stopping one was almost impossible for a human—even if he had inherited the power of the Martial God.

"Kuh."

Si-Hun stomped on the ground.

'Still, I have to do it.'

He had to move instead of wasting time thinking that he couldn't do it.

'Heavenly Dragon Rush.'

He put more strength in his legs, as if he were squeezing out all the power that his body could give him, and chased the avalanche.

'It's not moving very fast.'

The farther down the mountain, the less steep it became. They'd used the second set of scrolls to create a barrier that reduced the force of the avalanche considerably, so it was moving very slowly.

'I can catch up to it.'

The land fluctuated as if it were a wave.

Si-Hun stomped on the ground and spread both hands.

'Sword Control.'

The weapons of the Players who had died in combat floated in the air, serving as stepping stones for Si-Hun.

"Kuh."

He had never controlled so many swords at once before, and it felt like his brain was melting. The Qi within him started to run rampant.

'I have to do it.'

Si-Hun's eyes shone sharply.

If he didn't do it, the place where Gaia was would be engulfed by the avalanche.

Tap, tap!

He stepped on the swords and rushed through the air.

His head ached even more, and his vision blurred.

"A-Aaaaahh!!"

Si-Hun thought about the circulation of his Qi, the principle of Sword Control, and the mysteries of foot techniques.

- Calm down.

Then he heard Kang-Woo's voice again.

Si-Hun nodded and bit his lip until it bled.

Riiing.

[Proficiency of Heavenly Dragon Movement Technique has risen!]

A system message appeared, but he ignored it. He calmed his breathing as he rushed through the air.

Rumble—!

'I caught up.'

Si-Hun saw the demon corpses get mangled and burst open after being engulfed by the wave of dirt and rocks.

'I need to get even more ahead.'

He had to get in front of the avalanche's path.

Si-Hun sped through the air even more swiftly.

Suddenly, there was nothing he could step on to go further; he had run out of swords to step on.

'Then....'

He looked down at the wave of dirt and rocks and stepped on it. The huge pressure in the dirt sucked his leg in.

"Huup."

Si-Hun took a deep breath and focused his Qi on his legs.

'I have to read it.'

He felt the flow of the dirt with his feet. Then he stepped on an area that was a bit more solid.

Running on a wave of dirt was far more dangerous than running on water. Nevertheless, Si-Hun ran along the wave of dirt.

Tap.

"Haaa, haaa," Si-Hun panted heavily.

He finally ran ahead of the avalanche and reached a narrow passage. The Guardians rearguard was just past that.

'I will protect them, no matter the cost.'

He raised his sword.

Whoom!

A pure-white sword appeared in his hands. Si-Hun held the sword in front of him as he prepared himself. He raised the sword over his head and focused his Qi.

Then...

[You must be Kim Si-Hun.]

A demon sitting in a wheelchair appeared in front of him.

Si-Hun's expression crumpled in exasperation.

'Shit.'

The situation wasn't good. He did not have the capacity to focus on the demon that had suddenly appeared.

[Tsk, tsk. You are so frantic. Do you not get tired?]

Belphegor, the demon with purple skin who was sitting in a wheelchair, snickered. He yawned.

[In any case, I heard the demon king cares for you deeply.]

Belphegor spread his hand, casting out dense demonic energy in the form of a net. It engulfed Si-Hun.

"Kuh!"

Si-Hun grunted.

'Shit!'

Anxiety swept over him.

If he didn't stop the avalanche, the rearguard would be destroyed. However, if he tried to stop it, he would get killed by that demon. It was the worst possible scenario.

"Hyung!"

Si-Hun closed his eyes, and Kang-Woo's face came to his mind amid the disastrous situation.

Wham!

[Hm?]

A giant hand grabbed the net made of demonic energy.

Rip. The net was torn apart.

"Balrog...?" Si-Hun uttered.

[You seem to be in a predicament,] Balrog said with a smile.

A thrilling sensation swept through Si-Hun. At that moment, even Balrog's hideous appearance looked cool to him.

"Who is—"

[Oh, that dickhead in the chair over there is Belphegor. He is a sorry excuse of a prince of Hell.]

Belphegor grimaced and retorted, [What? Dickhead? You son of a—]

Balrog patted Si-Hun's shoulder and said, [I will take him. You do what you have to do.]

Si-Hun thought about it for a moment before nodding. "I'll leave it to you, Balrog."

His timing had been messed up by the demon prince's interference. To stop the avalanche, Si-Hun needed to go further down to where the rearguard had been placed.

He turned and rushed down the mountain.

[Now, then...]

Balrog turned to face Belphegor.

Crack, crack.

He cracked his fingers as he clenched his hands into fists.

Then Balrog curled up one of the corners of his mouth and said, [Let us begin.]

\* \* \*

"You must be the demon king."

"Hm?"

Kang-Woo heard a voice from behind while he was waving the light sticks. He slowly turned around.

He saw someone who was wrapped in blood-stained bandages and carrying a rusted saber, which had blood-colored demonic energy swirling around it.

"Ah, you must be Crimson Fiend, right?" Kang-Woo asked with a smirk.

Crimson Fiend, the monster wrapped in blood-stained bandages, nodded and answered, "Correct."

"Dayum, you look absolutely savage. Is the rusted sword some sort of shtick?"

"What?"

"Shiiiet, that's pretty cool. You're giving off an 'I don't rely on weapons' vibe. I like it," Kang-Woo expressed while nodding.

He liked the dreary atmosphere the rusted sword gave off that one couldn't get from an extremely sharp sword.

"Hah." Crimson Fiend feigned laughter. "You are crazier than what I've heard."

"That's not a very nice thing to say to someone you're meeting for the first time. Do you know me? Hm? What a rude piece of shit, calling someone crazy as soon as you meet them," Kang-Woo rebuked with a frown.

Crimson Fiend's eyes filled with anger. He gripped his rusty sword while feigning laughter again.

"It seems words will not get through to you."

"Shouldn't you at least say something resembling a proper conversation before you say that? You literally only said 'Correct.' and 'What?' after your first line. And then you say that words won't get through to me? That's just not fair, is it?" Kang-Woo remarked as if he was actually frustrated.

Crimson Fiend gripped his sword tighter.

"This is the demon king?"

He couldn't believe it.

A demon king should be more dignified and serious. After meeting the being that terrified both Satan and Belphegor for himself, Crimson Fiend's disappointment was immeasurable, and his day was ruined.

'He is no different from the worthless scoundrels of the Hao Society.'

The demon king spoke casually, and he also cursed a lot. Rather than a demon king, he seemed like a gangster.

Crimson Fiend looked at Kang-Woo in disappointment and said, "I had high hopes for you after hearing that you had reached the pinnacle of demons with a human body..."

"Oh, right. Speaking of a human body, I'm curious." Kang-Woo crossed his arms. "You're human too, right?"

He knew very little about Aernor, and much less about Huan. He didn't even know if it was a place where humans lived.

'He looks human, at least,' Kang-Woo thought.

Crimson Fiend was covered in bandages, so Kang-Woo couldn't be sure.

The tips of Crimson Fiend's mouth went up as he replied, "Yes. To be precise, I was human."

Bam. He drove his rusty saber into the ground.

"But not anymore. I studied the demonic arts for a thousand years to go beyond the limits of a human." Crimson Fiend made a cunning smile. "I doubt you could even imagine the pain I had to go through to get this demonic body under my full control for a thousand years."

From what he'd heard, the demon king had accepted the power of demons without paying any price due to a power known as the Authority of Predation.

To Crimson Fiend, who had trained for a thousand years to perfect his demonic art, he felt it was simply unfair.

'The same goes for the princes of Hell,' he thought.

They had been born with great power without having to pay any price for it; they had been born to become rulers. There was nothing more unfair than that.

"There is a limit to power obtained with no effort. I will prove that to you right here and now," Crimson Fiend declared and drew out his demonic energy.

The princes of Hell had warned him many times about the demon king, but he could not acknowledge their warning to be true.

'There is no way someone born human can use demonic energy better than me.'

He'd invested a thousand years into learning how to control demonic energy. There was no way that he would lose if he were to fight against someone who had also been born a human—at least, that was what he thought.

"A thousand years?" Kang-Woo smirked. "That's not even worth a comparison."

He got up and raised his hands, summoning a double-edged sword made of hellfire.

"You're not ready yet."

Chapter 240 - Remnant (1)

[Hah.] Belphegor feigned laughter and glared at Balrog in absurdity. [Have you lost your mind, Balrog?]

Belphegor frowned and rested his chin on his hand, leisurely leaning back on his chair. He narrowed his eyes.

Balrog was the vice commander of the demon king's army, as well as one of the demons who had received the demon king's favor. He was far above the level of regular archdemons and was known to be on par with the princes of Hell.

However...

[You dare face me, Belphegor, by yourself?]

Balrog was ultimately not a prince of Hell. There was an insurmountable gap between the princes and other demons, so even if he'd received the demon king's power and was considered the strongest among the archdemons, that was all there was to it.

Balrog couldn't defeat a prince of Hell.

The princes of Hell had been born to become absolute rules. There was no being in the far and wide Nine Hells, other than the ancient demonic beasts, who could fight a prince of Hell by themselves.

[Why? Are you scared?] Balrog asked, a smirk on his face.

[Hah.] Bephegor feigned laughter once again. He lowered his head and tried to hold back his laughter. [You must have lost your mind after winning the thousand-year war.]

Belphegor extended his hands toward Balrog and continued, [Remember this, Balrog: it was the demon king who won, not you.]

[You could not be more right.]

Balrog waved his hand, and a whip covered in dark-red flames appeared from a black Rift. He grabbed the whip, and the tips of his mouth went up.

[And you lost.]

[...]

Belphegor remained silent and glared at Balrog. The memories of the bitter defeat in the thousand-year war returned to him.

It was extremely unpleasant.

[You must have forgotten how scary the world is from being under the demon king for so long.] Belphegor mockingly added, [A mere remnant who could not even protect his master.]

[...]

A remnant... Balrog's eyebrows twitched.

[Have you completely forgotten about Beelzebub? He used to be your master, had he not?]

Belphegor snickered.

Beelzebub, the Prince of Gluttony.

Among the princes, he was the only one who had his seat stolen by another demon. Bael had killed Beelzebub and taken his place.

The largest battle before the thousand-year war had been the war between Bael and Beelzebub. Beelzebub had lost, his position as prince of Hell had been stolen, and even his Hell Armament had acknowledged Bael as its new master.

Bael had devoured Beelzebub's retainers. All of them, save one, had died in immense pain. Only one demon managed to survive Bael. At the time, Beelzebub's most loyal subordinate was Balrog.

[Aah, I still remember how you looked when you lost your master. You made a fitting image of a loser who had lost his master and had been plundered of desire. Your dead eyes were truly a sight to behold.]

[...]

[Kekeke. And you went to the demon king to die in the most wretched way possible, did you not?]

The first meeting between Balrog and the demon king was quite a famous tale even in the Nine Hells. At the time, Balrog considered the most wretched death for a demon was to die at the hands of a human, so he had gone to the demon king and begged for the demon king to kill him. He yearned to be freed from the guilt of having been unable to protect his master by his side.

[... I am sure no one had expected that human to become the demon king.]

No one could have possibly imagined that the person Balrog had visited to die a most wretched death would become the demon king.

Belphegor shook his head as if he didn't even want to think about the demon king.

[But I am curious about it, even now. I am sure the demon king at the time was still weaker than you, so why did you serve him? Hm? Were you that desperate for a new master? It is truly something to lament. Have you imagined how much Beelzebub would grieve if he saw you right now?]

[Belphegor.]

[Pfft, hahahaha!! I cannot believe you forgot about the master that you had been so loyal to as soon as he died and switched to a new one.]

Tsk tsk.

Belphegor clicked his tongue.

[This is why raising a mutt to be loyal is pointless.]

Slam!

The giant Balrog shot up into the air. He swung his whip, which was covered in dark-red flames, with blinding speed.

[Hmph,] Belphegor snorted.

His Authority activated from his outstretched hand.

Authority of Stillness.



This Authority, which could drastically slow down the time in a certain area, restrained the whip.

The whip, which had been moving at supersonic speed, stopped in midair as if an invisible hand had grabbed it.

Tap!

Balrog let go of the whip without hesitation and shot down toward the ground while flapping his wings. He clasped his fingers together and swung his fists down on the ground.

Rumble!!

Rocks scattered in all directions like cannon fire, momentarily obstructing Belphegor's vision.

Belphegor's expression crumpled.

His Authority of Stillness had a condition—it could only drastically slow time in areas within his field of vision.

Since his vision was obstructed, the Authority of Stillness was dismissed.

Balrog appeared from between the rocks, and a huge fist resembling a boulder smashed Belphegor's head.

BOOM!!

The chair that Belphegor was in rolled backward quickly. Before the fist had touched him, Belphegor had narrowly managed to use the Authority of Stillness to protect his face.

[Kuh!]

Still, he wasn't able to fully mitigate the blow. Black blood dripped from Belphegor's mouth after he was hit by the demonic energy exuding from Balrog's fist.

With his back straight, Balrog said in a deep voice, [You talk too much. Is your mouth not as lazy as your body?]

[...]

Belphegor grimaced. He was humiliated by the fact that the likes of Balrog, who wasn't the demon king or a prince of Hell, had managed to deal the first blow.

[Worthless remnant!]

Belphegor extended both hands and, with the Authority of Stillness, created blades of time that couldn't be seen or heard. The formless blades, which would twist time in a fixed space to slash a target, poured down on Balrog.

Slash!

Balrog crouched down.

As the formless sword made contact with his demonic energy, the flow of demonic energy in that area slowed down drastically.

Balrog closed his eyes.

Belphegor's attacks couldn't be seen, so using his eyes would only hinder him.

He needed to dodge the formless attacks using only the demonic energy that he could sense from them. Using rapid movements that were hard to believe were performed by someone with his giant physique, Balrog dodged the blades and approached Belphegor.

He clenched his right hand into a fist, and his whip, which had been on the floor, flew toward him as if it were alive and wrapped around his fist. He twisted his body and pulled back his fist, which was blazing with dark-red flames.

[Do you seriously believe that will work on me?!]

Belphegor mockingly laughed at him. He created a barrier that wrapped around his body with the Authority of Stillness. Everything that entered the area five centimeters from his skin was put at a standstill due to the drastically inhibited flow of time.

It was an absolute barrier.

[Sky...]

Balrog stretched his left foot forward and stepped firmly on the ground, pulling his shoulder back and lowering himself. He concentrated all of his strength on a single point before unleashing his fist in a display of explosive power.

[... Breaker.]

BOOOOM!

It was a technique of his master, Oh Kang-Woo.

Although it was just a simple punch, the principle behind it was extremely complex. One needed to have perfect control over the demonic energy that flowed from one's hips to the shoulder and to the fist, and let it burst the moment one punched. But of course, even Balrog would be met with immense recoil if he used such a technique.

However, Balrog had a characteristic no other demon had: Demonic Armor. Balrog possessed a barrier of demonic energy above his skin that he did not even need to consciously maintain.

That unique characteristic protected his fist, and...

[Kurgh!!!]

Belphegor's body bent over like a bow. He was blown away along with his chair and rolled over the ground violently. He coughed up a massive amount of black blood.

[H-How?]

Belphegor looked at Balrog in confusion.

Even if the strength in Balrog's fist was powerful, it shouldn't have been able to pass through his Authority, which controlled the flow of time. It wasn't possible.

[Shit, shit, shit!!]

Belphegor cursed with his hands on the ground. Balrog slowly walked toward him.

Remnant.

That sad nickname echoed through his head.

"Stop shitting around being a fucking drama queen and screw off."

Memories of the past came back to him like a flashback.

"I was not able to protect my master."

"Who asked?"

"I came to you to pay for my sins."

"The fuck are you on about?"

Balrog explained to Kang-Woo, who did not seem to understand, the humiliation of dying by a human's hand. Kang-Woo feigned laughter after listening to the explanation.

"Oh, so you came here to die?"

"Yes."

"Haaa. I should've known from your dead-ass eyes."

He laughed from the absurdity and walked away, ignoring Balrog.

"Save the pity show for TV, dickhead."

"..."

"Stop being a bother and fuck off. I'm busy."

"You... are not afraid."

"What?"

"This is the Ninth Hell. It is ruled by the princes of Hell. It is completely different from the Hells that you have been in."

"I've heard it all before coming here, man."

"No, you do not know. You... have no idea how terrifying the princes are. If you did, there is no way that you would not be afraid."

"Fucking hell, you're so damn nosy."

Kang-Woo lightly stomped on the ground and flew toward him; then he grabbed his collar.

Balrog was finally able to see his eyes.

His white eyes and black irises stared at Balrog.

"Ah..."

Chills went down Balrog's spine.

Kang-Woo's eyes were shining with a desire stronger than that of any demon. His desires were burning to the point of madness.

Balrog already knew the name of the desire reflected in his eyes.

"I don't give a fuck about the princes or whatever else is here," Kang-woo said. "It doesn't change what I have to do."

Answer to evil with greater evil, and return bloodlust with even greater bloodlust. Keep moving forward while devouring everything in the world.

"If you're done talking, then fuck off. I have no time to waste on a fucking remnant like you. If you want a humiliating death, stick your head into a demonic beast's ass or something."

[HAHAHAHA!]

Balrog, who had been walking toward Belphegor, suddenly burst into laughter after walking down memory lane.

[Balrog...!]

[Aah, my apologies. I just thought of something from the past.]

Balrog smiled. He raised his fist, which was covered in dark-red flames, and beckoned Belphegor with the other hand to taunt him.

[Stand up, Belphegor. The battle has only just begun.]

[Kuh.]

Belphegor glared at Balrog intensely before placing his hands on the ground and pushing himself up. He placed his hand on the chair he had been sitting in.

[Balrog.]

Thick demonic energy swept away the surroundings.

Crack, Crunch!

The wheelchair changed form. The fragments of the broken chair gathered back together to create armor, which was white as if it had been made from bone.

[I will make you regret making me stand.]

Sloth, the Hell Armament in the form of armor emitting drearily evil energy, wrapped around Belphegor.